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ABSTRACT

This document consists of the four 2001 issues of a journal (formerly "Journal of Educational Relations") published to promote student achievement through positive school-home-community relationships. Articles in the first issue include: "Crossing Basic/Higher Education Boundaries through a School-University Partnership" and "How a Group of Middle School Students Learned To Fail." Articles in the second issue include: "What Should Be the Role of Community in Character Education?" and "Provide School and Community Orientation to Retain Your Teachers and Staff." Articles in the third issue include: "Administrators Need To Study Communication" and "Parent Involvement at an At-Risk School Contributes to Increased Student Achievement." Articles in the fourth issue include the following: "Perspectives on School Public Relations: Challenges Yet To Be Met" and "Special Needs of a Long Distance Commuting Parent with a Family." Each issue also contains a teaching or administrative case study and response, book reviews, and articles in which educators share insights regarding improvements in school-community relations. (HTH)

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School Public Relations Journal.

Formerly the Journal of Educational Relations.

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Albert E. Holliday, Editor

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SCHOOL PUBLIC RELATION

Journal

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Promoting student achievement through positive school-home community relationships Vol. 22 No. 1 • 2001

Notes from the Edi

A New Name and A Re-Newed Frequency

We trust the name ***School Public Relations*** journal will be more informative about our purpose and content than our most recent title, the *Journal of Educational Relations.*

And we found that producing the journal on a quarterly basis—as opposed to a semi-annual frequency in 2000—is preferred by a majority of our subscribers. So we have returned to publishing every three months, starting with this edition. Subscription terms have been adjusted so each will receive four quarterly editions.

Chalk these two changes to *trial and error.* When something does not work as intended, admit the misstep and move ahead—that's our motto.

Guest Editorships Available

Once again, a major part of an issue is devoted to articles arranged by a guest editor. This time, Judy Cochran of the University of Missouri has been successful in having articles written, just for this journal, on a variety of parent involvement issues.

We like this approach, because a guest editor enlists writers and researchers who would otherwise be unknown to us to contribute their knowledge, often on unique topics and from a different perspective than we usually encounter.

A prospective guest editor is asked to provide an overview or outline of the topics or issues to be addressed. Then we agree on the range of articles and deadlines. The editor is responsible for four to five articles of 1,750 to 3,000 words each on a related topic. We'll need five copies of each article to send to our jury for review before publication.

Email Encouraged

Our email address for correspondence is **aholliday@earthlink.net**. We encourage your comments and suggestions via email or to 717-761-6620.

Al Holliday

Albert E. Holliday
Editor-Publisher

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Preface by Guest Editor Judith A. Cochran, University of Missouri—St. Louis

Formal collaboration among community groups and people who operate schools is a necessary direction for educators. Talking with experienced teachers will verify that community involvement in schools has changed as much in recent years as the children they teach.

As the E. Desmond Lee Endowed Chair of Tutorial Education, I am to establish and direct collaboration among colleges and universities and nine United Way agencies to support underserved youth in St. Louis. Developing positive relations among participating agencies, universities, and public schools is a component of the Institute's success. The public relations, communication and understanding of changing educational relationships in partnerships are the focus of the articles invited for this issue.

The articles include 1, an analysis of a K-5/university staff partnership designed to increase student achievement; 2, a critical history of the search for authentic partnerships between educators and parents; and 3, a case history of how students from an inner city school fared when they were bussed, by court order, to a white suburban school. (Note that a fourth article has been held over to the next issue of the Journal because of space constraints. This article is a review of efforts to build character education components into schools in the St. Louis area.)

The journey toward the needed partnerships will be an uneven one of shifting power bases, vanishing instructional boundaries, and multiple concepts of how education should be constructed.

In too many schools, violent and even deadly incidents by students in our schools make the case that all is not right with society. Schools are no longer isolated from the pressures and stresses of society.

School administrators will need training/courses in such areas as partnership construction, communication and human relations. Given the movement for external control of education by business and government forces, collaborative partnerships may become the groups that will have school ownership and replace elected school board members.

Administrators with educational training in school finance, school law, curriculum and history of education will want to learn how to effectively collaborate with community groups to enhance the education they provide their increasingly diverse and demanding student populations.

My article on the educational effectiveness of busing African Americans to largely white suburban schools and Fahey and Helwick's work on developing university/public school teaching partnerships in a largely Hispanic school address issues of teaching culturally diverse students. The articles emphasize the need to collaborate with youth-serving community agencies and universities to develop appropriate instruction for culturally diverse students. Schools cannot be expected to address the instructional needs of African American, Hispanic American and Asian American students using the traditional European American male model.

Judith A. Cochran is director of the Regional Institute for Tutorial Education at the University of Missouri—St. Louis. The institute has 10 community agency partners and seven higher education institution partners.

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Crossing Basic/Higher Education Boundaries

Through a School-University Partnership

by Kathleen R. Fahey and Ginny Helwick

Six teachers and the principal from the Dos Rios Elementary School and six professors and two doctoral students from the University of Northern Colorado collaborated as partners to address the needs of teachers and students at the school around language diversity and language problems. At the conclusion of the three-year partnership, the authors of this article agree that outcomes include these:

- Teachers assumed additional responsibility for their students with special education needs.
- Partners took on roles based on the needs of the group rather than based on titles.
- Partners interacted with families through home visits to establish communication.
- Teachers interacted and learned from other teachers.
- Partners made presentations of their work at professional conferences.
- Faculty used the partnership experience to improve their own classroom teaching.

In addition, a number of boundaries or barriers in usual school-university collaborations were crossed or overcome.

Collaborative projects between teachers in elementary schools and professors at universities are often designed and orchestrated by a professor or two and often involve grant monies. It is usual practice for a professor to first gain the interest and participation of a group of teachers, and then come to the school to complete the activities and goals of the project through teacher participation.

This partnership on language diversity, however, was a collaborative venture involving six teachers and the school principal, six professors from different disciplines and two doctoral students in special education. The purpose of the partnership was to engage in activities to improve the academic achievement of students who had language-related learning problems.

The project evolved during its three years as the participants made joint decisions. The flexibility of its design allowed the construction of ideas and the opportunity for participants to assume different roles and take on a

variety of responsibilities.

Participants included six elementary teachers from grades K-1 and 4-5 and the school principal at the Dos Rios Elementary School. The six professors were from three colleges (Education, Arts and Sciences, Health and Human Sciences) at the University of Northern Colorado and from six disciplines representing different perspectives on language: Anthropology, Bilingual Education, Communication Disorders, English, Reading, and Special Education. The doctoral students were both in the Special Education degree program.

The school, with 575 students and 22 teachers, is located in north central Colorado, near the university campus. Sixty percent of the students are Latino, 40 percent Caucasian. The six teacher partners and the school principal remained the same for the three-year project, as did the six professors and the two doctoral students. The authors have included quotes from the 15 partners to illustrate their experiences and observations. Text references to individual teachers meant the six teachers in the partnership.

The partners met for two or more hours twice monthly over the three-year period.

The first year involved a discussion of "best hopes and worst fears," introduction of the teacher-as-researcher model[1] and continuous joint study of topics that enhanced understandings of language and its relationships to learning. Some of the topics included household funds of knowledge[2], the various discourse patterns of the home and school[3], and language differences versus language disorders[4].

During the second and third year, the partners completed detailed case studies of students whom the teachers were concerned about. Each teacher selected one student in her class who was eligible for special education services. A small group was formed consisting of the teacher, a professor, and a doctoral student to: a) study the student's educational and assessment records, b) discuss classroom performance, c) review IEP goals and objectives, d) collect and study information about the home language and parents'

Home visits by the project staff offered new perspective about the student and family relationships and opened new communication channels between the home and school.

perspective through a home visit, and e) design classroom interventions.

During the third year, case studies were written including descriptions of the ongoing classroom interventions and assessments. In addition, the participants contributed to a video documentary that summarized the project experience and the case studies, as well as prepared and delivered numerous presentations involving the collaboration of partners at professional national, state, and local conferences.

The outcomes of the partnership have been numerous. One of the most profound outcomes was a repositioning of the various participants in the way they viewed themselves in relationship to students, collaboration, professional activities, and research. Many boundaries were crossed in the process of the project. Most of these were unexpected, and we believe they were the result of the flexibility and co-constructed nature of the experience.

The focus of this paper is to highlight the ways in which participants assumed new roles and how they became full partners in the collaborative venture of working with other professionals in the search for improved student learning.

Boundary #1: General and Special Education - Roles and Responsibilities

None of the partners were directly a member of the school special education staff. However, the project groups prompted the general education teacher to take increased ownership in the language and learning goals of the student with special education needs. For example, teachers interacted directly with group members to discuss the language problems of their student.

To Ensure Successful Educational Partnerships

- The members of the partnership should be selected from volunteers who are willing to commit their time and talents for an extended period of time during after-school hours.
- The leader of the partnership must have strong facilitation and delegation skills.
- Adequate time and space is needed for partners to speak freely without interruption.
- Partners must develop their goals and objectives through a collaborative and constructive process.
- Partners from higher education should be considered by the rest of the schools staff as a vital part of the school-community, rather than guests, researchers or instructors.
- Each partner should have the freedom to explore new roles and take on new responsibilities.
- Incentive from funding sources or the school administration should be in place to reward teachers for their commitment and work during the partnership.
- Minutes of partner meetings should be kept to record decisions, assignment of roles and responsibilities, and to chronicle discussion ideas.
- Partners should be encouraged and given released time to present project reports at professional conferences and through professional publications.
- Products generated through the partnership that focus on student achievement should be shared with other teachers within the school and district.

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Together the group watched videotapes that the doctoral students filmed within their classrooms and discussed them from the multiple perspectives of the participants. The groups also discussed the data collected from the files and from the home visit. They engaged in problem solving that resulted in the formulation of specific goals for their student.

The process of working together produced a heightened awareness of the classroom teacher's responsibilities and roles with students who have special education needs. The discussions about the nature and types of discourse and the discussions about specific student's interventions led to a change in the way some classroom teachers viewed their responsibilities with students. They worked with their doctoral student to infuse the interventions into the classroom. They were the lead members of the planning team. This involvement seemed to provide teachers with a renewed sense of accountability and commitment to the students. One teacher commented, "I think I'm really good at picking out what students' troubles are, but I don't always know what to do for them. The project provided a support system through observing, reflecting, journaling, and sitting down and talking about what needs to be done."

One of the doctoral students noted that "at the beginning there was a clear separation between regular education and special education, but by the end each teacher perhaps saw benefits of sharing more and working together. I watched teachers become more empowered to think, well, wait, why am I giving my kids away to special education when they may not be doing anything that's particularly connected with my curriculum? That makes it tougher on the student because she has to learn two different things from different styles and teachers. I watched the teachers become more willing to try to include the special education teacher in the classroom and in instruction."

Boundary #2: Professors, Doctoral Students and Teachers - Ivory Tower and the Trenches

The teachers and principal at the elementary school were the hosts to the professors and doctoral students. This is not usual protocol. Typically, professors teach classes that teachers and doctoral students take, or professors invite teachers and principals to the university to talk with students as a part of a class. Certainly, doctoral students spend a great deal of time with professors and little time with teachers. Thus, the partnership offered teachers the unique opportunity of having professors from a variety of disciplines and doctoral students in special education to come to the school for discussion and mutual problem solving.

Throughout the project, the participants played out different roles and responsibilities as the needs arose, rather than roles being designated because of position.

For example, the professors provided the readings and led the discussions for the most part during the first year because they had access to the pertinent readings and the time to prepare the materials and discussion framework.

The teachers, however, took charge when the case studies were initiated about students whose language problems were interfering with learning.

The role of the doctoral students

"Teachers don't often share with other staff members because they feel defensive of what they are doing, when in fact they are doing so many wonderful things."

shifted from classroom ethnographer, whose job it was to take notes and to videotape the student, to classroom interventionist as the case studies evolved from collecting information to interpreting it and then trying some interventions.

Once again, the flexibility of the partnership structure allowed individuals to assume roles suited to their particular talents and areas of interest.

There was an expectation of some teachers at the beginning of the project that the university professors would design and facilitate the roles and activities of the partners. Yet, these expectations changed as the project unfolded and required different levels of participation. Dr. D. Kim Reid, the project director, summed it up this way: "There was a lot of early disappointment because there was an expectation that we, the university folk, were there to do inservices or tell people how to do things. My opinion is that some teachers experienced what we did as marking time, false starts, going off in funny directions. But what was in my mind was really waiting for them to take the reins and be empowered enough to say 'I can do this. This is what I need.'"

Boundary #3: Families and Triad Members - Home Visits

The decision to complete case studies led to the decision to conduct home visits. The anthropologist led discussions about "household funds of knowledge" and the group discussed home and school discourses to prepare for the home visits. Some teachers and other members of the small groups had not accomplished home visits, so the experience was new to them.

It is uncommon for the families of students to have a home visit from school personnel. The anthropologist said, "From day one, it was always my position that the home visits had to be central to the project or none of this would work. The proof in the pudding would be getting the families involved in a particular way that they had not been involved before. When you do feel you can establish yourself on a long-term basis with the people, they become the ethical framework. It

becomes a whole process by the families sharing the home with the teacher, and the teacher, in turn, inviting ongoing dialogue with the family."

Noting the significance of the home visit, one teacher stated, "I think that home visits are very powerful and it's probably that link to communication that we're missing a lot of times with parents. And that probably on both ends there are a lot of reservations. We're afraid to step over that boundary, afraid that we're invading their privacy, and then the parents are afraid that the teacher is, maybe again there are barriers that they'd be embarrassed about."

The home visits offered a new perspective about the student and family relationships and opened new communication avenues between the school and home. For example, group members learned about the student and family in an atmosphere where the parents were more comfortable than they would have been at school, about the willingness of parents to discuss the student, home factors which may limit or encourage parent participation, the student's environment which helped in understanding the student in a more holistic way, and an opportunity for parents to know school personnel on a more personal level.

Boundary #4: Teachers and Teachers - Collaboration

It is easy to take for granted that teachers within the same building teaching the same students from year to year know each other well and have opportunities for sharing and learning. The partnership put an end to this myth. The university professors and doctoral students may have felt like visitors for a short while, but it also became evident that teachers do not usually have the time or opportunities within the school year to share and learn together. The partnership provided the time and structure for this sharing and learning.

One teacher provided some thoughts about this. "I think part of it was our group meetings that we held twice a month. To me, that was real important time. When you are an educator and you work in an elementary school, you don't get to be around adults very often, or at least not in a professional light. So, I found it really enlightening to be around primary and intermediate teachers, college professors, and graduate students who were meeting for a common purpose to dis-

The project served to show that such partnerships between a school and university staff can have lasting benefits for all participants.

cuss educational issues."

Teachers related to one another in a new way as they shared videotapes of their students within their classrooms and their experiences writing in journals about their observations and reflections of student learning. Teachers tend to be autonomous within their own classrooms, yet they let down this barrier of autonomy to share their ideas and get suggestions from the large group. While this may have made them vulnerable, the sharing led to an openness among teachers as well as specific ideas for each teacher to take back to her classroom.

One teacher remarked, "My expectation was looking at children in my classroom, but also looking at children in other classrooms. So, I think sometimes helping understand where children are coming from at an earlier age helps us understand our own classrooms. I always felt that, if teachers of younger students could hear what our needs are and what we're working on, it would be very beneficial for them as well."

Boundary #5: Doctoral Students and Elementary Students - Learning Together

The doctoral students had the unique opportunity to fulfill several roles and to be directly involved in classrooms. The classroom and partnership activities were a workground for learning and experimentation in an authentic setting.

First, the doctoral students were neutral observers during the ethnography phase of collecting observations about the language of the classroom. They observed in the classrooms and kept a journal about the language of the classroom from the teacher, the students during classroom comment, and the underground language of students.

Second, they videotaped each student who was being studied in a variety of classroom situations. They brought the videos to the small group meetings for discussion and problem solving.

Third, doctoral students worked with a teacher and a university professor in small groups to study the selected student's strengths and needs. They collaborated with the teacher to write the case study and develop the intervention plan. They also worked directly with the teacher and student to implement the intervention plan in the classroom. They were able to try strategies and build relationships with the students.

A teacher commented on the value of participation from the doctoral students. "I really enjoyed Molly coming into my room and working and seeing her work with the kids. But also, she was an encouragement to me. I'd say something to her and she'd say 'You're too hard on yourself.' And I think as educators we do tend to be hard on ourselves -- that we don't think we are doing a good enough job. But other people can give you insight into yourself as an educator."

One doctoral student remarked, "The partnership reinforced my belief in meeting children where they are and understanding their background and home environment. It reinforced my struggle with labeling kids as 'learning disabled.' It reinforced my beliefs that teachers often don't share with one another because they feel defensive of what they are doing, when in fact they are doing so many wonderful things. It also reinforced the idea of feeling more comfortable in trying different things

to solve problems yourself or inviting others to work with you."

Boundary #6: Scholarly Activities

The continuous joint study of readings and journal articles during the first year left several participants wondering about the purpose and focus of the project. Yet, this activity was important because it laid the foundation for shared knowledge among partners from which the other activities then emerged.

The readings fostered discussions and reflections about the social, cultural and academic issues surrounding language and learning. The university professors brought the research perspective to the discussions about the articles and the teachers sought out the practical applications of the information to the classroom. For example, the principal was diligent in asking how the information helped teachers improve student achievement. "I think if anything has changed I think it may have been the teachers and going back to their classrooms and saying 'I've learned a little bit more, and what I've learned from one child I may be able to apply to another child.'"

Another way that teachers, professors, and doctoral students crossed boundaries was to engage in group presentations at professional meetings. Some of the teachers and doctoral students had not had previous experience in presenting their work at professional conferences. These activities provided them an opportunity to share the information that they had learned, but perhaps more important provided opportunities to think about what they had done.

Several of the university professors have provided insight about how the partnership experience resulted in direct application to university classroom teaching.

- First, the content of what was learned could be transferred to specific classes in education, English, special education, and communication disorders.
- Second, a broadened appreciation of the diversity of language and learning in university students helped one professor to be reflective about students' needs and about teaching about language. "I'm trying more and more to talk to my university students about the realities of language as a whole as I talk about specific systems of language. For example, I ask them to reflect on why they use language the way they do, why they know what they know, why they prefer one style to another."
- Third, the project kindled passion about power inequities that influence the teaching of university students. The project director remarked that as a teacher, she began to look at issues of inequity and power relationships between professor and university student.

Conclusions

The project director's goal of the partnership on language diversity was to provide a context for teachers and university faculty to work together. Their task was to address a question of interest to elementary school teachers in a way that would bridge the gap between teachers and faculty, research and practice, and two separate value systems[5]. The activities of the partnership resulted in many outcomes, but among the most important for its participants was the flexibility that

allowed for the crossing of the boundaries cited in the article.

1. Teachers came to assume added responsibility for their students with special education needs,
2. All participants took on roles based on the needs of the group rather than based on titles,
3. Participants interacted with families to establish communication,
4. Teachers interacted and learned from teachers,
5. All participants collaborated to prepare and present the outcomes at professional conferences, and
6. Faculty used the partnership experience to inform their own classroom teaching.

The value of establishing and participating in elementary school-university educational relations is to establish alliances between two communities. In this way each can inform the other about educational research and practice. The individual growth and the relationships that form from such collaborations extend the opportunities for future collaborative work.

The anthropologist in this partnership spoke of the outcome of the project as a repositioning of participants. "Even though it was suppose to be student-oriented and student driven, it became much more driven by our own needs to communicate and establish understanding and how to work collaboratively."

Kathleen R. Fahey is an associate professor and assistant chairperson in the college of Health and Human Sciences, Department of Communication Disorders at the University of Northern Colorado. She is a speech-language pathologist with expertise in normal development of speech and language and assessment and intervention of school-age children with language disorders.

Ginny Helwick is a doctoral student in the College of Education, Special Education Division at the University of Northern Colorado. She was a general education teacher for 30 years and a special education teacher for several years during her doctoral studies.
Both authors participated in the partnership. They can be contacted at the Department of Communication Disorders, University of Northern Colorado, 1400 Gunter Hall, Greeley, CO 80639.

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PHOTO GALLERY: Geri Kody.....

You never know what you can't do until you don't try.

Gene Hegel

How a Group of Middle School Students Learned to Fail

by Judith A. Cochran, Ph.D

Abstract

Children who are failing middle school share many of the same issues. In this case study of five urban children bused to a suburban school, the belief of "better" education in suburban schools is examined.

A lack of communication among the suburban staff; between sending and receiving school staff; and among teachers, students and parents overall led to the academic failure of these students. Limited homework help and attendance compounded the staff's failure to accurately test or read diagnostic data, provide instruction in remedial areas, encourage student strengths, and accept external help for children. This study explains how that group of middle school children learn to fail.

I came to be a volunteer teacher-mentor in my daughter's middle school classroom accidentally.

On the way to a parent-teacher conference, my daughter told me that her teacher had said, "This is the worst class of students I have ever had in 31 years of teaching." When I asked the teacher if she had told her class this, she admitted that she made the statement, saying that her frustration stemmed from the many low-ability students in the class.

As a parent and educator, I considered that I had an obligation to assist, and I thought I could contribute. I volunteered to go to the school three days a week on my lunchtime to work with the teacher's "worst" students. After checking with the principal, the teacher accepted my offer, and we agreed that I would work with the students in the library for the remaining eight weeks of the semester.

The Volunteer and Students Meet

The first day, I led to the library four African American and one Anglo student, four girls and one male. All of them had been bused to this suburban school from the city, as part of a desegregation ruling. They were personable, bright, and verbal, and had been identified by their communities as "academic leaders." Enthusiastically, they talked with me about their learning and how they wanted to work with "smart girl's" mom. We made a list of courses they wanted to work on. All of them asked for Unified Studies, a composite of social studies, reading, writing, and geography.

Their teacher showed how she had selected these children for me to work with based upon their low scores on the Degrees of Reading Power Test. Developed in 1979 at the University of New York, the test gave the teacher percentages for each student. For example, the Anglo student had 11% on the test. None of the passages were labeled according to grade level. The teacher then had an 11% score to guide her instruction for one student. But she didn't know what the 11% meant. The test gave me no information that could guide my instruction. I then decided to check each student's records to learn their standardized test scores.

What was the Current Status of Students?

Student records sent with them from their urban school had scores from years of the Stanford Achievement Test, the Otis Lennon Test and the state-developed achievement tests. As expected, the three tests did not correlate among each other or clearly show the abilities of an individual student. The categories were difficult to compare and the results were not useful for instruction.

For example, all teachers felt the boy needed special education, but he had not been fully diagnosed and in fact, the boy could be brain-damaged. His test scores, however, gave no indication of any learning or social problems. He was in the mid-range on all test areas of the Stanford Achievement Test using national and local norms. His IQ, as assessed on the Otis Lennon, indicated no deficiencies. Despite average or above test scores, his grades were straight Fs and he was in danger of not having enough credits to pass seventh grade.

Another student, the Anglo girl, had scores uneven in most areas with the lowest IQ possible as measured on the Otis Lennon Intelligence Test. She had been in special education classes all year. Her reading, on the Stanford, was in the average range. If her IQ was really as low as tested, she should have been institutionalized and should have had a much lower reading score reflective of her limited ability. The data gave me no consistent diagnosis for her or any other student.

I was forced to test the students myself in order to get clear instructional directions. I had learned that all other students had an IQ in the average range with the exception of the Anglo girl described. I had no other children with limited capabilities. There had to be other reasons for the failure of all of these failing students.

I decided to use one of the many published reading tests that I had used in both my elementary and secondary reading methods classes. The test was

When I finally met with the school's administrators, the first comments of the principal were to note that I had had access to students' test scores without parents' permission.

made up of multiple forms pre-primer to eighth grade level. The purpose of the test was to discover the strengths and weaknesses of the reading ability of individuals. For instance, did they need help understanding the main idea or learning vocabulary? Could they follow the story line?

The test was helpful to me in understanding their needs. To supplement their regular classroom instruction, I developed vocabulary, reading and study skills instruction. They wrote plays, acted out vocabulary words, helped each other with homework, and took their regularly scheduled class tests. I gave them handouts, magazines, books, and vocabulary lists. Their teacher kept me up to date with their program and problems in their regular classrooms. My goal was to continue diagnosis and see if obstacles to their academic success could be identified.

Case 1 - Marcus

I began with Marcus, the boy who read independently on the fifth grade level. Marcus wanted to re-read *The Outsiders*, a book previously read by others in Unified Studies. When I gave him a copy of the book, he told me that he had been reading it every night. He wrote about it in his other "special" class demonstrating that he could write paragraphs. I asked him why he was not doing his homework, and he admitted he watched too much television. When he turned off the TV, he was able to do his homework. This was a case of a 12-year-old needing adult supervision. His mother was a working single parent with three boys: a 12 year old, a 6-year-old and a 4-month-old. I was able to find a university student who would be willing to call this young man and check that he had his homework done. In one week, Marcus pulled his weekly grade in Unified Studies from an "F" to a "C-". His progress report came the next week stating that he had turned in 43% of his homework, compared to 24% on his last report card. However, as he hadn't done all of his homework, he had failed literature, grammar, reading, and history, and only passed spelling.

Marcus told me that he would do part of his homework and then he got "stuck." His regular teacher gave him a sheet to have his mother sign to verify homework completion. The second week he didn't have his mother sign the homework sheet because he "didn't have a sheet." He hadn't done his grammar in Unified because he "couldn't find his book." Meanwhile, the teachers were "modifying" all of his work so that he could pass. A special teacher was helping him during Art class. And yet, in one 20-minute period, he and another student wrote a logical, coherent play using history vocabulary.

This was an under-performing child who could pass all his classes but was not doing so. Why not? Because Marcus had not learned to take personal responsibility, and did not have adult supervision at home.

Student files had scores from three major tests, but they did not correlate among each other or clearly show the abilities of an individual.

Case 2 - Nichole

Nichole read on the eighth grade level but she was failing because of poor self-confidence. This girl was responsible for helping a grandmother who needed surgery and two younger brothers at home. Her mother was out of town working during the week and came home only on the weekends. This 13-year-old said she knew she needed to do her homework, but she had not learned how to control her brothers, so they would let her have time to study. We developed several things she could do to manage her brothers including putting a movie on while she was studying and promising, but not giving them candy. The last suggestion only worked once. Her writing showed she did not understand parts of speech like subject, verb, indirect and direct object, predicate nominative and predicate adjective. After short, direct explanation, she had a good understanding of the concepts and could apply them to her own writing. She had had years of previous instruction on these concepts, usually begun in second grade, but did not have the self confidence to feel that she could apply them to her own work.

She also said that she knew how to read assignments and answer questions but she didn't know how to study. When tests were given, she didn't do well. In seventh grade, students need study skills instruction. All students said they had not been given "any" study skills instruction. According to her teacher, Nichole also needed encouragement about her successes so that she can continue to learn and become an academic as well as a social leader.

Case 3 - Leonia

Leonia, who read independently on the sixth grade level, seemed to be having other problems. Her writing was not understandable and she often did not pay attention. She told me that she was on Ritalin, a medicine for attention order deficit. She said that she often "spaced out and went into pictures on the wall or anything that she stared at." Her testing indicated that she understood the main idea and story line and could make logical inferences from the story. Her intelligence was recorded so low that she was in special education classes and yet her focused reading performance was where it should be for a seventh grader. She was, however, failing all of her courses.

She had intervention help in special education. She would go to all of her teachers, get her assignments early, do them in her special education class and fail the classes. I began with her teacher to learn if the medication dosage was appropriate and the teacher said that she would check with the parents. This student continued working on her homework, and on her writing, which was unreadable and incoherent. When I looked at her vocabulary worksheet, I saw she had just written words down after the first three because she "didn't

Check List for Schools with Failing Students

The term "failing" is used with all of these children where previously such children have been labeled "at risk." Following are factors or interventions that are necessary if students who are at risk for dropping out of school are to achieve success at any level of their education:

❍ 1. Tests that are to be used by staff and teachers to plan and modify instruction should provide useful and clear instructional information.

❍ 2. Adults or tutors are needed to provide after school homework help and to monitor study areas free from distractions such as television and siblings.

❍ 3. Study skills necessary for each subject must be clearly identified by teachers so students know how to use them for homework and tests.

❍ 4. Teachers and counselors need to help children make the connections between the relevance of school success to their personal goals.

❍ 5. Children coming from urban homes may not have adequate school supplies. Schools need to provide supplementary notebooks, pens and compasses for students.

❍ 6. Training in counseling skills for the staff is necessary so students can be taught how to manage conflict with other students, teachers, and administrators.

❍ 7. School/parent linkages are necessary to encourage students to attend school regularly.

❍ 8. Remedial classes, supplementary school programs, adult and financial support for students with low skills should be provided.

❍ 9. Administrators must give as much attention to "at-risk" students as they do to passing students.

❍ 10. Courses in cultural diversity and instructional units to discourage discrimination against minorities and those who are "different" than their peers should be offered.

❍ 11. Consistent quick communication is necessary among school districts' administrators and teachers for transfer students. Written reports should be provided about a student's study skills, academic competencies, and family strengths.

❍ 12. Consistent communication is needed among supervisors of various after-school programs and school staffs so that students will receive appropriate remedial assistance.

have time to find them in the book." She also said that she just filled in the blanks on her standardized tests. Most of her homework was illegible and meaningless. This student didn't want help in her special education class. She could write down meaningless words and finish quickly without teacher help. Her goals were to be a swimmer in the Olympics or a surgeon. She seemed surprised when I told her that students who failed school could not become surgeons. This child showed little emotion unless she was talking

about swimming. This 14-year-old had personal goals, which, to her way of thinking, did not require success in school.

Case 4 - Isabel

Isabel began our sessions by not attending them. She had been suspended for a time from school for talking.

When she returned, I found that she could read without help on the fourth grade level. However, she was easily distracted. At progress report time, her mother angrily wrote that she wanted to know "what was going on" with this student's low grades. Apparently, she had not been receiving progress reports from teachers and had little knowledge of Isabel's low grades. The next week, although her mother was concerned about Isabel's grades, she took her out of school for two days to visit relatives in another state.

She told me that "words" were her main problem in reading. When placed alone at a table, she wrote down words but she didn't know what they meant. The next session she was absent because of a headache and sore eyes. I was uncertain whether she was really sick or looking for an excuse not to read. During the two months that I volunteered, Isabel was suspended twice for disrespect of other students and teachers. She was also gone for the family trip. Isabel had a need for social training in conflict management and for a school liaison who could work with her parents to inform them of her progress and help them encourage her school attendance.

Case 5 - Erinne

Erinne was able to read and understand only on the first grade level, although she was in the 7th grade. She was not in special education, but obviously needed extra help in reading. She was friendly, easy-going and discouraged. Her grades were passing except those related to subjects where reading was required. Her Unified teacher said that no matter how hard she worked, she still got failing grades. But since she was asked to read seventh grade material and had only first grade skills, her positive attitude and hard work were impressive. She had such low reading skills, all in such a defeating environment, school was difficult for her. When taking tests, I found she needed directions explained to her, and then she worked hard. She is the middle child of three, living with the mother and a stepfather. Her father recently remarried and she has a new stepmother, who seems to take interest in this girl. Without necessary academic skills and no special help, school success will be difficult for her. Her only hope seems to be in relying on her new step-mother, who may be able to read directions for her assignments.

How Do Administrators React?

With my diagnostic information, I made an appointment with the school's administrators, including the school principal. I proposed three changes: administering a reading test that would provide useful information to all teachers, establishing a support group for students bused from the inner city to this suburban school and developing this group of students into a leadership team for other students.

The principal's first comments were to note that I had had access to students' test scores without parents' per-

mission.

The administration took notes of what I had to say and promised to get back to me at a later date. When I later checked with the assistant principal asking if he had made contact with the university student mentor I had identified, he said they were playing phone tag. I then called the university person again who reported no one from the school had contacted him.

Every time I was in the school building, I tried to contact the principal. At a luncheon for volunteers, the principal had learned that there was money available for student support. I then sent him a copy of a possible grant that would further increase funding for students who came from the inner city. That was of May 1999. However, no grant proposals were written, no mentors were contacted, no support groups for the bused students was established, and no additional academic support was provided to help any of these children be successful in school throughout the 1999-2000 school year.

Conclusion

These 13- and 14-year-olds are failing their classes even though they had been identified as "academic leaders" in the inner city. Bused to schools where they might develop into successful students, they have been given no additional academic support while having limited resources at home. They return home after school with the knowledge that they cannot be successful outside their own community.

Desegregation, at least in this case, has not resulted an adequate education for some future leaders in urban areas. Like many middle school students, they lacked study and academic skills, homework help, adult supervision after school and motivation. Without additional help from the community, school or home, their suburban educational experiences have taught them to feel academically inferior. Likewise, the "county" students in their classes learn that inner city children cannot be academic leaders, as they are unsuccessful in the classes where "county" students excel. Special education classes are filled with bused urban children while they are noticeably absent from accelerated math, English and science classes.

Adults, desiring to equalize education, have established a system that ensures that discrimination continues.

Attending school outside their community has helped these bright children learn to fail.

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PHOTO GALLERY: Albert E. Holliday

When something can be read without effort, a great deal of effort has gone into its writing.

E. J. Poncela

Parent-Educator Partnerships–

A critical history of the search for authentic and respectful home-school relationships.

By Jan Valle and D. Kim Reid

Given the unquestioned consensus that parental involvement promotes children's school success, we explore how effective public school personnel have been in initiating and sustaining positive relationships with parents. Using a critical, historical perspective, we trace the relationship between parents and schools throughout the last 150 years. Results of this critical review indicate that, historically, interactions between parents and schools have reflected the same complicating, alienating effects of prejudices that have marred our nation's history-gender bias, classism, xenophobia (i.e., antipathy toward immigrants), and racism. Even today, schools continue to reflect a dominant white, Anglo-Protestant, middle-to-upper class culture and school boards and educators work to assimilate nonmainstream students and their families into that culture. To move beyond the rhetoric of cooperation and realize authentic and mutually respectful home-school partnerships, public school decision-makers must respect diversity in all its forms and adapt to the needs of children and parents from all intersections of race, ethnicity, class, gender, religion and so forth–without treating parents as a monolithic group or, individually, as stereotyped representatives of the particular groups to which they belong.

Since the inception of public schooling in the United States, the marriage between parents and educators has been a cyclical historical pattern of love and hate.[1] Initially, schools served as the extension of the home, with the community selecting, controlling, and housing teachers.

Nevertheless, by the time schools began to become bureaucratized in the 1840s, parents and school personnel had already become adversaries. Although still financially dependent on parents for school-supporting taxes, educators began to view themselves as experts who knew more than everyday folks. Capitalizing on the sense of national unity that followed World War I, however, school administrators

Even today, schools continue to reflect a dominant white, Anglo-Protestant, middle-to-upper class culture, and school boards and educators work to assimilate nonmainstream students and their families into that culture.

reversed this competitive relationship by intentionally cultivating parents as allies and advocates.

But by the 1960s, with new opportunities presented by the Civil Rights Movement and the War on Poverty, parents again became rivals, this time pressing for multicultural education and local control. And this time, they were supported by federal legislation. Today, with public schooling under fire, the anthem is increased control through choice. Parents may chose from a broader range of publicly supported curricula, often offered in charter schools, and Congress is at least debating approval for vouchers.

Despite this continuing cycle of cooperation and antagonism, current reform programs endorse parent involvement as key to school success. The National Education Goals Panel, for example, identified partnerships between parents and schools as a major factor in promoting academic, emotional, and social growth in children.[2] The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future also described parent involvement as a critical feature of successful schools.[3] Both political conservatives and liberals espouse positive and productive home-school collaboration. As Ursula Casanova points out, parental involvement has "become an acceptable truism" in the national debates on education.[4]

Active Parent Involvement Viewed as a Positive

Parents and teachers agree with the reformers. For instance, in a 1993 national survey, public school parents overwhelmingly supported active partnerships with schools.[5] Likewise, teachers' believe that one of the most crucial policy issues facing schools today is the promotion of active parent involvement.[6]

Why this intense faith in the importance of parental involvement in schools? Certainly the shared responsibility for children and historical precedent are factors. In addition, researchers have documented a positive link between parental involvement and student achievement[7] and children's self-confidence and attitudes toward school.[8]

Given the consensus that educators and parents must work together for the benefit of students, we ask an essential question: How effective are our schools in promoting and sustaining positive relationships with parents? Because understanding home-school relations depends on knowledge of how they came to be, we will take an historical perspective. Because we want to understand why the road to collaboration has been so rocky, we will evaluate the tradition of parent involvement in light of critical theory, which assumes that:

> ...all thought is fundamentally mediated by power relations that are social and historically constituted; that facts can never be iso-

> lated from the domain of values or removed from some form of ideological inscription; that the relationship between concept and object and between signifier and signified is never stable or fixed...that language is central to the formation of subjectivity; [and] that certain groups in any society are privileged over others...[9]

A Critical History of Parent-Educator Partnerships

Despite two centuries of continuous engagement, parents have had very little impact on schools. William Cutler notes that white, Anglo-Protestant, middle-class parents, mostly mothers, have always been the most active participants.[1] Examining the nature of the interactions that resulted from their efforts, however, makes all too apparent the complicating, alienating effects of the broader societal prejudices that have marred our nation's history-gender bias, classism, xenophobia (i.e., antipathy toward immigrants), and racism.

During the colonial era, prosperous, white Anglo-Protestants initiated and supported public schooling. Even then, however, a competitive relationship existed among the family, the church, and the schools–each vying with the other for control over education. It was the bureaucratization of schools, however, beginning in the 1840s, that Cutler says

> drove a wedge between the home and the school that would widen as the nineteenth century progressed. Increasingly, parents and teachers faced each other across a gap that featured systematic procedures and standardized expectations. Report cards replaced more personal forms of communication. Graded schools became the norm...the development of teachers' institutes and normal schools gave rise to the belief that esoteric knowledge made teachers uniquely qualified to oversee the education of the young.[10]

He also notes a unifying theme that accounts for the prominence of mothers in school-linked organizations: the hiring of mostly young women to teach in the elementary schools served to reinforce the idea that, as mothers or teachers, women were the guardians of the young.[1]

Gender Role Expectations Disempower Mothers

As women and mothers, the early organizers of home-school partnerships were expected to follow societal rules of decorum. They avoided school policy debates because they believed that confrontation with the men who were running schools (women were teaching in them) was unseemly. As a result, they contented themselves—in the early National Congress of Mothers, the later Parent Teacher Associations, and subsequent groups—with assisting teachers by performing menial tasks, supplying school libraries, or improving facilities.

In addition, as schools became increasingly bureaucratic and scientific, gender-linked stereotypes diminished mothers' credibility. Male superintendents and teachers newly steeped in scientific knowledge welcomed the fact that mothers formed clubs. It was easier to channel group, rather than individual, energies into helping teachers, supporting school policies, and acting as public relations agents in the now professionalized schools. William Reese

commented that home-school "cooperation was a fine thing in theory, it seemed, as long as parents behaved properly...even an indifferent parent was preferable to one who repeatedly clashed." [11]

There were some white, upper- and middle-class Fathers Clubs, mostly social in nature, and some fathers participated in PTAs. Because PTAs were one of the few women's domains, however, mothers often resented male participation. Men did occasionally become policy-oriented and confrontational, but, as they did with mothers, school administrators diverted their energies into serving educator-identified needs. A few fathers exercised real power through election to boards of education, but they were typically the social and economic elite.

Women, too, were sometimes elected to school boards, but clearly as tokens–it was rare for more than one woman to serve at a time. When men were actively involved in their children's schooling, mothers usually deferred to them. Cutler relates the story of Alice Bechtel, a leader in the New Jersey public schools of the early 1900s, who took on the distant state legislature to prohibit the sale of cigarettes to minors. Yet this same woman thought that her local Haddonfield Mothers and Teachers Club must defer to fathers on matters of athletics and property. Clearly, middle-class stereotypes of the proper woman's role are helpful in understanding this discrepancy in her behavior.[1]

Furthermore, gender roles were saturated with classist, xenophobic, and even racist sentiments. Expectations for financially comfortable, white women dictated that they show concern for the less fortunate, particularly the poor, but also the culturally different, who were perceived by these women, who embraced middle-class Anglo-Protestant standards, as misguided or inept parents. Accordingly, many of the early mothers' (and mothers'- and teachers') clubs sewed clothes for poor students or, later, developed school lunch and medical screening programs. Although these good deeds were beneficial to those they served, they also extended the schools' power and paternalism. Wealthy taxpayers, however, sometimes argued that such benevolence would diminish parental responsibility and eventually lead to poor parents becoming "spineless wards of the state."[12]

In general, both Anglo-Protestant mothers and school administrators thought poor, Catholic, and/or immigrant parents incapable of raising their children properly. PTA members, then, began to view their organization as the perfect site for parent education. It was their goal to effect a single standard that would integrate home, school, and community and counteract the "cultural deterioration" that might result from "too much ethnic heterogeneity." School administrators applauded their efforts, because, of course, they served the avowed assimilationist function of schools.[13]

Parent involvement has "become an acceptable truism" today...but the imposition of WASP, middle class standards in our schools serves to marginalize the working class and immigrant population

African-American parents, on the other hand, were typically left to take care of their own needs. Their parenting skills were certainly considered questionable and their children's school achievement low, even if deemed appropriate for their "station in life",[14] but the PTAs showed no inclination to include African-American members. Even when schools were integrated, the National Council of Parents and Teachers, despite a clearly top-down management style, left it to the local organizations to determine whether PTAs would be integrated. Most were not until the African-American community became visible and vocal in the 1960s.

Federal Legislation Led to Some Change

In 1965, things began to change. Heightened awareness of the inequalities brought about by the Civil Rights movement led the Johnson administration to launch its War on Poverty. In an effort to disrupt intergenerational poverty, the federal government introduced both Head Start and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to enhance the education of low-income children.[15] Within this political climate of cultural pluralism and social consciousness, a transition occurred in the relationship between schools and parents. Federal programs, such as Head Start, required the involvement of low-income parents in educational decision-making and programming. Mandatory home visits provided an avenue for developing close partnerships between teacher and parent.[16] In addition, many of the early childhood programs encouraged low-income parents to observe their children and volunteer in classrooms, take paid positions as paraprofessionals when qualified and, of course, given the continuing emphasis on changing parents while keeping schools the same, participate in weekly parent meetings about topics related to proper family life.[17]

Thus, the War on Poverty targeted interventions not only for low-income children, but also for low-income parents, really mothers. For example, Lillian Feldman, former Head Start program director in Syracuse, New York, recalled that mothers volunteered, belonged to the Mothers Club, trained as teacher's aides, and participated in high school equivalency and college programs.[18] In keeping with historical precedent, many lay people and experts assumed that in order to resolve poverty in the United States, the culture of the poor needed to be "fixed." If low-income mothers could be taught to parent like white middle-class mothers, their children would be "ready" to begin school with less negative influence from their own "disadvantaged" culture. Educators now took an active role in assimilating low-income and culturally diverse mothers into the dominant culture's idea of schooling and parenting.[19]

The Assumed Roles of Women and Men

The Women's Movement, originating in the 1960s and mushrooming into a large-scale public debate by the 1970s, had little impact upon conceptions of gender operationalized by schools. For example, there continued to be a paucity of research pertaining to fathers' involvement in schooling or the impact of fathers upon their children's learning. Educators continued to regard mothers and female teachers as holding primary responsibility for the education of children. Consider this

educational journal's cartoonish portrayal of a primary school parent awaiting a teacher conference:

> Perhaps now she is to receive her report card as a mother! Tuesday afternoon, bravely dressed, she enters the school, smiling in a slightly superior manner, clutching her purse tightly...Mother waits her turn to enter the sanctum.[20]

PTA leadership and membership also continued to be dominated by women. Fathers were silent, absent.[21] Furthermore, PTA projects were often in keeping with assumptions about what women could do and liked to do. They included such "female-oriented" projects as holding bake sales, organizing teacher appreciation days, and maintaining gardens at school.

Despite documentation of increasing divorce rates and numbers of working mothers, educators remained largely insensitive to the needs of parents outside the traditional two-parent family norm.[22] Educators continued to assume that mothers were free to volunteer, attend meetings, and supervise homework. Mothers who could not were simply marginalized.

It was not until the 1980s that feminist scholars began to expose the male-oriented, technical-rationalist character of schooling. Jane Martin, for example, asserted that the patriarchal attitude of public schools "makes the educational activities of mothers, and by implication mothers themselves, appear nonrational, if not downright irrational."[23] Mothers were subjective and emotional. Mary Belenky and colleagues explain:

> the kind of knowledge that is used in child rearing is typical of the kind of knowledge women value and schools do not...Good mothering requires adaptive responding to constantly changing phenomena; it is tuned to the concrete and particular... "maternal thinking" differs from scientific thinking...[24]

More recently, David Engel concluded that "gender stereotypes undoubtedly play a part in the construction of authority and in assumptions about objectivity and subjectivity in the decision-making process."[25] Mothers, because they are women, are disempowered in the face of the objective, scientific, and bureaucratic institution of schooling.

For nearly two centuries, then, the school participation of mothers had been subject to all of the biases and prejudices that have contaminated our society generally. The white women were kept in their place, while at the same time they enjoyed the privileged stance that enabled them to view Others—the poor, Catholics, immigrants, and African Americans—with sympathy and disdain. Nevertheless, recently the feminist analysis of schooling has challenged traditional ideas and assumptions about gender roles in subject matter, curriculum materials, school leadership, and student-teacher interactions. Exposing ways in which girls' experiences of school differ from boys' led to heightened sensitivity and even some changes at the school level. Parent-educator relations, however, have not changed as the result of such new insights.

Classism and Xenophobia Predominate

We will discuss these two problems together because most immigrant groups to the United States have in fact

PTA projects were often in keeping with assumptions about what women could do...such as holding bake sales, organizing teacher appreciation days and maintaining the school garden.

taken turns among the shunned poor and working classes, with each group moving up the socioeconomic ladder as its members blended into mainstream "American" culture. Because of these differences in class and ethnicity, families, unlike schools, were never monolithic. As school staffs standardized, they adopted white, Anglo-Protestant, middle and upper class values. These in turn created more and more problems for poor and working class families. As a result, the gulf between lower class families and the schools increased.

Before the early 1900s, most immigrant children simply did not attend school. With both industrialization and the advent of the scientific study of children, however, mainstream Anglo-Protestant parents began conceptualizing their children as evolving to adulthood through a period of prolonged, protected childhood. They began looking to the schools for help with issues related to health and socialization as well as Eurocentrically-focused academic instruction. As schooling consequently became more extended and compulsory attendance and child labor laws became more enforceable, working class parents found their relationships with their children being mediated by the state, which had now, through schooling, taken over the functions of preparing students for work and citizenry.

Parents from different ethnic groups responded in different ways. People from southern Italy, Serbia, Poland, and Slovenia, for example, were more likely than Eastern European Jews to seek ways to take their children out of school to work. Eastern Europeans, on the other hand, would sometimes appeal for the right to take the oldest sibling out of school to support the costs of schooling younger brothers and sisters.[26] In either case, these families were often viewed with condescension by those parents and educators who touted the benefits of extended education.

By 1925, when the schools had taken on a social services function, day-care workers, school nurses, and visiting teachers were confronted squarely with issues of cultural difference.

Ironically, although many were first- or second-generation immigrants themselves,[27] school staffers grew insensitive to cultures other than their own and often decried the deficiencies, real or attributed, of working class and immigrant parents in neglecting their children's health and school attendance. Little was said about overcrowded, understaffed schools or the true need of poor families for income. In fact, although a few administrators faulted the schools when students failed to attend, most educators and social workers blamed the family.

Leonard Covello[28] spoke to the issues for Italian-Americans, who were likely to put their children to work because they distrusted schools. Teachers typically did not speak Italian or understand Italian culture. More

important, teachers represented the most visible institution of Americanization, while Italians valued the sanctity of the Church and authority of the home and wanted their children to embrace their Italian cultural heritage.

It became gradually clear that immigrant and working class families would have to conform to the mainstream educational milieu. By 1935, those who represented the scientific, technical-rationalist vision of education were gaining increasing public respect. They recommended that families to put their faith in better-informed professionals. Schools were running smoothly without the involvement of parents, many teachers did not care about what was happening in the students' homes, and "the alienation was self-sustaining."[29] These policies led to difficulties that became clear to the mainstream community only after the 1960s, when people from non-dominant groups became vocal about the indignities they had sustained.

Who Is to Blame?

Despite widespread acknowledgment of inequalities based on class and race during and after the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, social and economic systems in the United States were not considered the underlying causes of poverty. Rather, the cause of poverty was thought to reside in the family life of children, described as "disadvantaged." Thus, the deficient home environment, and by implication the mother, was identified as the cause of educational failure. Federal anti-poverty programs, like the local and parent-sponsored programs that preceded them, were designed to teach low-income children and their mothers the skills to conform to the white middle-class and largely Anglo-Protestant educational system. The paternalistic rhetoric of the War on Poverty mirrors that used in the first half of the century to justify assimilation of the low-income, immigrant population.

Consequently, significant attention was given to the study of low-income children and their parents during the 1970s. Studies which "proved" differences in mother-child interactions based on socioeconomic background gave further impetus to intervention programs, such as home visits.[30] Ira Gordon referred to this activity as "missionary work now couched in a more professional scientific framework."[31] Now "scientific" evidence absolved educators of responsibility for instructional failure of students by blaming it on "deprived" family environments.

The feminist scholars of the 1980s turned their attention to the idea that mothers were the source of blame for school problems. These researchers claimed that blame should be rightfully transferred "from mothers to the social and economic structures in which mothers' lives are embedded."[32] Although such a reconceptualization represented a potentially significant shift in the perception of low-income (and culturally different) mothers, no dramatic impact upon educators' attitudes has been documented. Furthermore, in the face of these unacknowledged economic and social obstacles, many low-income parents and communities found it easy just to "cede authority and control to professionals."[33]

Results of Recent Immigration Increases

The denunciation of national origin quotas as discriminatory enabled immi-

"Scientific" evidence has absolved educators of responsibility for instructional failures by blaming such failure on "deprived" family environments.

gration to the United States to swell during the latter half of the 20th century. Diversity among immigrants also increased, with an influx of people from Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia, and Africa. Paralleling the response to immigration in the early 1900s, members of the dominant culture have expressed growing concern in recent decades about this increasing diversity (especially in regard to Latinos and Asians) and its impact upon "American" culture and education.

Public schooling, with its tradition of promoting the political, social, and economic agenda of the majority culture, is hospitable to students who speak English. In contrast, students who bring diverse languages and cultures to school often struggle and eventually drop out.[34] With the dominant culture as the standard by which other cultures are judged, school personnel often persist in making negative assumptions about the abilities of immigrant children and their families.[35] Many such children are referred for special education services and, as a result, are partially excluded from the benefits of the general education curriculum.

Recent studies reflect growing awareness of the social issues having an impact on the relationship between educators and parents. For example, in the 1990s, we see a new inclination to study elite parents (i.e., middle-to-upper class members of the dominant culture) and to break the silence which surrounds ways in which schools operate to the advantage of this elite. Amy Stuart Wells and Irene Serna, for example, studied elite parents' "ideology of entitlement" and their political strategies for deflecting detracking reforms. Although these parents consistently argued that their children's potential for academic success would be compromised in a detracked setting, the authors assert that what these parents really feared was a loss of status and power within a system that is currently geared to ensure "an intergenerational transmission of privilege."[36] In addition, in interviews conducted with middle class, college-educated mothers, Ellen Brantlinger and Massoumeh Majd-Jabbari discovered that these parents verbally espoused liberal pedagogy, but ultimately clung to the traditional white, Eurocentric curriculum because of the inherent benefits for their own children.[37]

In sum, the imposition of white Anglo-Protestant, middle-class standards in our schools serves to marginalize the working class and immigrant population. Keeping the parents of these families at bay is just one way to ensure the inheritance of elite privilege. Tracking, special education, and other school policies, intentionally or not, often serve much the same function.[38]

The Debilitating Impact of Racism

No other groups have been so badly treated by educators in the United States as African Americans and Native

No other groups have been so badly treated by educators in the United States as African and Native Americans.

Americans. African-American parents' ties to public schools are related to the history of schooling of African American children. In the 18th and 19th centuries, black slaves were not permitted to learn to read or write; it was too threatening to their owners.[39] When African Americans were finally permitted to attend schools in the 20th century, they were nearly always relegated to segregated, inferior schools and usually prepared for menial labor. The Latin Schools, in which many African Americans succeeded admirably in learning academic content, were attacked and ultimately destroyed by Northern industrial philanthropists fearful that schools were preparing blacks to rise above their station in life. Actually, because of white prejudice, many of these well-educated African Americans had difficulty getting work.

Highly educated Native Americans also had difficulty securing employment commensurate with their advanced level of preparation. Their history, however, is somewhat different. Native American children were enrolled in residential schools run by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The avowed purpose of such schools was to re-make Indian children in the likeness of Anglo-Protestants. Their parents had no input into their educations. Tragically, when they returned to their reservations after schooling, many could not even communicate with their families, because they had been stripped of their native tongues in favor of English.

African American children, on the other hand, largely remained with their families.

By the 1930s, the National Congress of Colored Parents and Teachers had affiliated with the National Congress of Parents and Teachers, the organization that represented most white, middle-income PTAs. The black organization emerged from the self-help, church-based groups that African American women formed as a response to white discrimination. Although the goals of the two groups were nearly identical, the white organization was too afraid of offending its members to invite black parents to join. Instead, they offered to help African American mothers build their own organization in a way that Cutler describes as "[n]ot a little smug and condescending..." [40] This decision had important consequences, because, without the support of white parents, politicians and school administrators simply dismissed African Americans' concerns. In 1945, a group of black parents convened by the United States Children's Bureau called attention to the inferior status of black schools and the need for parent education among African Americans. The black community had internalized the need to educate black parents!

It was not until the Civil Rights movement was well underway that parental rights became a central issue for schools.[41] Local control was re-established by federal judges who required that school and community advisory councils be composed of both

white and African American parents. The regulations associated with the War on Poverty required community representation and participation as well. These multiracial school and community councils sometimes heightened tensions and both race and class issues contributed to their ineffectiveness. Even in places (e.g. New York City) where public, mass rallies were held in support of school desegregation, little was accomplished. African American parents experienced great frustration. Although they won some rights, their children still attend mostly segregated schools and their influence over American educational policy was still regrettably limited.

Minorities Seek to Speak Out

However, the Civil Rights movement provided the impetus for African American and Latino citizen groups to challenge the professional and alienating stance of educators. For example, people in New York communities such as Harlem, Bedford-Stuyvesant, and the Lower East Side angrily lobbied for decentralization of schools and autonomy of school affairs.[42] Operators of experimental schools, such as the Springfield Avenue Community School in Newark, New Jersey, espoused "parent power" and a curriculum designed and run by the community.[43] Resistance to the stereotype of urban, minority parents is recorded in the voice of one Harlem parent:

> ...parents want to be involved with their kids' education...parents are beginning to ask questions and they don't have the same kind of respect for teachers they had before. Maybe it can be built back up again, but it can only happen if teachers respect parents, too.[44]

In the 1960s and 1970s, integration of schools posed a dilemma for minority parents who had to decide between sending their children to neighborhood schools of inferior quality or sending them out of their own neighborhood to a white school with a better educational program.[45] Despite high hopes, reports of educational outcomes for minority children in desegregated schools continued to be disappointing. Derrick Bell argued that racism in schools was evident in the absence of black parents in the making of policy, the exclusion of black parents from active participation in their children's education, and the inability of black parents to hold school personnel accountable for meeting the educational needs of their children.[46]

In direct opposition to the cultural deprivation model of the 1960s, multiculturalism, which gained credibility in the 1970s and 1980s, focused on the strengths of cultural diversity. Although never conceived as a panacea for persisting racial inequalities, multicultural education challenged the dominance of the traditional white, Eurocentric school curriculum.[47]

Parents of diverse cultures may demonstrate interest in their children's education in a way that is different from parents of the mainstream culture–teachers can misinterpret these differences as a lack of interest.

The impact of multicultural pluralism can be seen in the research in the 1990s about Mexican immigrant families,[48] Hispanic, American Indian Pueblos, and Chicana/o families,[49] and Chinese American immigrant families.[50] Instead of advancing the same, tired rhetoric about the deficiencies and disadvantages of these families in comparison to the Anglo-Protestant standard, the new studies explore ways that educators can adapt to the needs of children and parents from various ethnic groups—without trying to enforce conformity by treating parents as a monolithic group or as stereotyped representatives of particular groups. This new research suggests the importance of mutual respect and true dialogue.

The Nature of Parent-Educator Relations Today

In reviewing the historical relationship between parents and schools, we are struck by the consistency of response of school administrators and educators to parents. Despite many political, historical, and social changes in society, our institutions (if not our research agendas) continue to reflect white, Anglo-Protestant, middle-to-upper class culture and to insist upon the assimilation of nonmainstream students and their families into that culture, "Americanization."

There is meager evidence of model programs demonstrating culturally relevant means of embracing non-white students and their families, but they are the result of exceptional efforts and resources. The evidence does not suggest any widespread or sustained change in the relationship between families and educators. Mothers still have primary responsibility for the education of their children. Students are still required to function in a predominantly Eurocentric curriculum. White middle-to upper-class students are still advantaged in maintaining academic superiority. Parents and their children continue to be judged against the white, Anglo-Protestant middle-class norm. With the exception of low-income parents of color's active resistance during and after the Civil Rights movement, in the last 40 years, little has changed in parent-educator relations.

Low-income parents, especially mothers, and those from nonmainstream ethnic and racial groups continue to be held to the male, white, Anglo-Protestant, at least high school-educated norm.

How to Explain These Situations

•Michel Foucault notes that the imposition of a standard allows "normalizing judgment," the ability to describe behaviors "objectively" as either good or bad in comparison to the norm.[51] Normalizing judgment lies at the heart of any system of disciplinary power. This power is based on hierarchical observations–school boards observe administrators, administrators observe teachers, and teachers observe students until each group takes on the values of the higher one and starts to monitor itself. Parents, however, are external to the day-to-day operations of this system (despite their nominal control through school boards) and that, perhaps in part at least, explains their lack of influence. Parents who are not white, male, Anglo-Protestant, high school graduates are, like their children, taught by educators how to be 'good' parents in the terms of that one, universal norm. By continuously teaching parents into these expectations, the

We need to overcome the mere rhetoric of parent involvement and move to authentic, mutually respectful, satisfying and ultimately productive partnerships.

original norm is maintained and "non-standard" parents remain powerless outsiders.

•Another deleterious effect comes from research in which parents are sorted into arbitrary categories that do not come close to defining or describing people's complex and multiple ways of being in the world. For instance, quantitative studies use random sampling techniques with what is reported as highly diverse constituencies.[52] In this case, random sampling may meet the strict criteria of the research design, but one must ask, when parents of a variety of income levels, races, ethnicities, and gender are mixed together in the sample, and we know that they have had very different life experiences, to what population can we generalize the results? We would argue to none.

•Another approach in research is to study groups of parents who are categorized as mothers, low-income parents (again nearly always mothers, but without regard to their race or class), as members of a particular race or ethnicity (without regard for gender or social class), or simply as generic parents. We must move beyond such simplistic representations to consider how parents are situated in the intersections of gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and race if we are to understand anything meaningful in the interactions between educators and parents. In doing so, we may be able to overcome the mere rhetoric of parental involvement and move to authentic, mutually respectful, more satisfying, and ultimately more productive partnerships.

The current literature, however, continues to suggest a considerable gap between the rhetoric of parental involvement and the reality of parental involvement. Not surprisingly, given our review, Susan Dauber and Joyce Epstein tell us that parents who are most likely to be involved in schools are still those who are educated and have small families that include children who are academically successful.[53] Those parents with less than a high school education are less likely to interact with school personnel.[54] Confirming our conclusions, Owen Heleen found that it is schools that are "hard to reach" as a result of

> ...a mutually reinforcing cycle of negative expectations: school people really didn't expect low-income parents to participate productively in their child's educational life and made few efforts to build positive relationships; poor parents, in turn, did not expect to be meaningful actors in their children's learning and often had nothing but negative experiences with the school.[55]

Negative expectations and the universal norm conspire to maintain the hold of the status quo. As documented in the work of Michelle Fine, estrangement between home and school is intensified within such asymmetrical power arrangements.[56]

•Additionally, experts continue to

define parent involvement within "institutionalized notions of family structure and family ways of being."[57] These notions persist despite evidence of increasing numbers of families that fall outside the traditional two-parent family norm.[58]

Failure to recognize and validate nontraditional families and gender roles also conveys a message of exclusion and creates unnecessary barriers between home and school.

•Because parents of diverse cultures may demonstrate interest in their children's education in a way that is different from parents of the mainstream culture, teachers of the majority culture often misinterpret these differences as lack of interest.[59] Furthermore, as we have noted, research suggests that teachers of the majority culture are likely to regard the home environments of culturally diverse families as deficient and not conducive to supporting education.[60] These findings take on particular significance in light of the increasing diversity of American society[61] and the overwhelming majority of teachers who represent the dominant culture.[62]

Clearly, we must learn to know people. Understanding neutralizes the need for tolerance.

Conclusion

In closing, we pose several questions for future researchers to answer: 1. What might account for the apparent gap between rhetoric and reality in regard to parental involvement in schools? The current literature answers only part of that question. We know that social expectations, power relationships, and technical-rational approaches to schooling are partially to blame. What other important factors might be involved? 2. A more important question is: How can we empower mothers and fathers of all social classes, ethnicities, and races, and how can we as educators work with them to effect positive change? 3. Finally, how can we fulfill the democratic ideals upon which this country was founded, and learn to embrace and benefit from our diversity?

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Nothing Bad Ever Happens In Balawood:

Pranksters Challenge School Image and Safety

By Phylis West Johnson

Friday, December 1, 8:20 a.m., the day of the incident

It was a dreary, overcast day in the City of Balawood, a city of 5,000 people. Quaint and quiet. Balawood was recently named "Best Hometown" in Idaho. Balawood High School's Scholar League recently won first place in a statewide academic competition. Nothing really bad ever happened in Balawood—until today.

It was the week after Thanksgiving, and three freshman boys—Johnny Winters, Clyde Burrow, and Tommy Tike—marched up the stairs to the front door of the high school—each dressed as jolly ol' Saint Nick. Armed with paint ball guns, the boys pushed through students in the crowded narrow corridor. Some students laughed, while others were alarmed and ran into the classroom to tell their teachers. When the boys reached the end of the hallway of the first floor, they opened the door of Emma Blithers' classroom and blasted her with paint. Blobs of orange and black paint spotted her bleached blonde hair pulled tightly into a bun. Having accomplished their misguided mission, the boys darted back down the hallway past students and teachers, and ran out of the building.

A number of students laughed and applauded the boys. Ms. Blithers, unfortunately, was not the most popular teacher at Balawood High School. And Johnny, Clyde, and Tommy were not among her popular or favored students.

Tuesday, November 28, 2:40 p.m., three days before the incident.

Only a few days ago, Emma Blithers, an older algebra teacher, had demanded that the boys be suspended from school after she caught them cheating in the back of the room during a test. The boys, on the other hand, complained to Principal Peters that she was incompetent and graded unfairly.

"Her class is a joke," remarked Tommy, a good-looking athletic boy, who was arrogant, to say the least. His parents, who had been called in for a conference with the principal, reinforced his attitude. They were visibly—and verbally—proud of their son's accomplishments, for consistently Tommy had the highest grades among his classmates, even as early as elementary school. Moreover, he had been recently named MVP on the Balawood High School Scholar League.

To make matters worse, Emma Blithers was stubborn and did not welcome any semblance of criticism directed toward her teaching style, which consisted primarily of her reading aloud the text to her class and an occasional exercise on the chalkboard.

Johnny explained, "Everyone cheats in her class, and she knows it! She just doesn't like us because we aren't afraid

Mrs. Tike said she didn't understand how her son could win an academic competition but then feel the need to cheat on a test. "It doesn't make sense—I blame the teacher."

to speak out in class."

Clyde added, "She only reported us cheating when we challenged her on a problem that we got wrong."

Principal Joseph Peters, 43, told the boys, as well as their parents, that he would support Ms. Blithers on this matter. "Regardless of how many students are cheating on their exams—as you claim, you were caught, and that calls for suspension." The parents had little to say, and requested that the boys be allowed to complete their assignments at home so their grades would not suffer.

"Suspension means suspension. They can take their books home, and they can study. But they will not be given credit for any work that they miss over the next two weeks. I am sorry, but that is school policy," explained Principal Peters, a tall lanky man with a heavy Bronx accent. He grew up in New York, and moved to the City of Balawood 15 years ago when he married his wife, Suzy Blithers, niece to Emma Blithers.

The parents argued for a bit, and then told the principal that they would appeal to the Superintendent and the school board, if need be.

"I understand, " said Mr. Peters. He continued, "And that is your right. But I have a responsibility to maintain a certain school conduct. Policy is policy."

Tommy's mother, Lydia Tike, said that she didn't understand how her son could win an academic competition in math, science, and history, but feel that he needed to cheat on an algebra test. "It doesn't make sense," she said. "I blame the teacher."

None of the parents accused the principal of taking the side of his aunt-in-law, and for that small favor, he was not only grateful, but relieved.

Todd Winters, Johnny's father and a neighbor to Supt. Harry Block, mumbled to the other parents, "Don't waste your breath arguing with the principal. He will not have the final say on this matter."

Peters, principal for nearly two years, did not give Mr. Winters' warning a second thought. He knew that his decision was based on sound school policy. If the superintendent wanted to overturn the suspension, he would have a difficult time justifying his decision publicly, if word got out to other students and parents.

Friday, December 1, 8:30 a.m.

Now, here it was only three days later, and Supt. Harry Block was mulling over whether to lighten the boys' suspension. He did not want to suspend school policy, but he didn't want to listen to his neighbor and good friend Todd Winters whine endlessly about Ms. Blithers, a 40-year veteran who had no tolerance for cheaters nor comedians in her classroom. On the other hand, Supt. Block had no tolerance for

incompetent teachers. Indeed, Block was on the telephone with Principal Peters to discuss the suspension.

"Perhaps, at the least, they could receive credit for their assignments. You know that Ms. Blithers is not one of your stellar teachers. I am not supporting what these boys did, but my daughter had her as a teacher two years ago, and she used to complain about Ms. Blithers day and night," pointed out Supt. Block, as he picked at his beard. Block was hard-headed on what appeared to be the least significant issues, such as where to place the new playground equipment in the schoolyard. But on other matters, such as taking disciplinary action against a student or a teacher, he swayed with popular opinion. Struggling to make a decision, he would sometimes rub his beard so incessantly that his skin would bleed.

"So then, what do I tell Ms. Blithers?" asked Principal Peters, squirming in his seat. He hated to talk to Ms. Blithers. The condescending tone of her voice made him feel like he was in high school again. Only two years until she retired, but alas not soon enough.

"Well, that's your job. Why don't you sit in one of her classes, and critique her teaching. When was the last time you did the rounds?" said Supt. Block "That's your job, right? If you think about it, these students were pretty much forced to cheat. You got to get on the ball, Peters," continued Supt. Block.

"Forced to cheat," thought Peters. He was silent. Principal Peters shrugged his shoulders, as he listened to the superintendent ramble on incessantly—even with the receiver nearly one foot away from the phone, he could still hear Block's booming voice.

It was at that moment that Emma Blithers flung open his office door, and began screaming. She was covered in orange and black paint from face to feet. She yelled, crazed with anger, "Look what those so-called nice boys did to me!"

"What—what happened?" exclaimed Principal Peters. "You mean Tommy and his friends? But they were suspended. What happened?"

"They—those hoodlums—marched into my classroom dressed as Santas, and shot paint all over me and my classroom," raved Ms. Blithers.

"Just now!" said Principal Peters. "Wait a second, just hang on, Harry." Ms. Blithers was hysterical, and Mr. Peters tried to calm her down. Supt. Block could hear the yelling, but he didn't know what was going on.

Principal Peters started to explain the situation to Mr. Block, but he had hung up.

As soon as Mr. Peters put down the receiver, the phone rang.

"What are you guys doing down there? Have you all lost your minds?" yelled Supt. Block.

"Sorry, but Ms. Blithers is here, and she says the same boys who were sus-

On matters such as taking a disciplinary action against a student or teacher, the superintendent was swayed by popular opinion.

Emma Blithers flung open the office door. She was covered in orange and black paint, face to feet—"Look at what those so-called nice boys did to me!"

pended came into her class and shot at her with paint guns. She is covered with paint. Look, I got to figure this out. I will get back to you."

"You do that. Call me back in 10 minutes, and don't make me come down there," said Supt. Block in anger and disgust.

Principal Peters walked down the hall with Emma Blithers to her classroom. The students were busy in the classroom, talking among themselves. When Ms. Blithers walked into the classroom, the students became quiet, and some struggled not to giggle.

Mr. Peters confronted the class, and said, "Did any of you see what happened?"

Many students nodded their heads.

"Okay then, let's hear what happened—one by one. Okay, Peggy, you first."

At that moment, two police officers opened the door of the classroom.

"Is everyone alright?" asked Officer Henry Grugg. As he looked around the room, he noted the paint splattered all over Ms. Blithers, the floor, and the walls. He continued, "Some kid called 911 and said there was a shooting. But when we called to confirm, your secretary said that it was some kids playing a prank. Looks serious. I'd call this more like vandalism, not just some childish prank."

"Thank you!" exclaimed Ms. Blithers.

"Thanks for coming," said Principal Peters. "We were just trying to figure out what happened. And who did this."

"I know who did this," blurted Ms. Blithers.

Nearly 15 students told the principal and the officer what they saw, and nearly all of them confirmed that Johnny Winters, Clyde Burrow, and Tommy Tike were the responsible parties. But no one could be sure. The boys didn't say a thing to anyone, and they were disguised as Santas.

"Well, we have enough cause to pick up these kids for questionning," said Officer Grugg.

Ms. Blithers was given the rest of the day off, and another teacher covered for her. As soon as Principal Peters got back to his office, he saw Supt. Block sitting behind his desk.

"I was going to call you," explained Principal Peters, nervously.

Interrupting him, Supt. Block said, "I know, I know. But with all that screaming, I had to get over here and check things out. So what's going on? I saw three police cars leave as I was pulling up in the lot. Nothing serious, I hope."

"No one is hurt. Ms. Blithers was shot with a paint gun. We think it was the boys we suspended, but they were dressed in Santa suits."

"Santa suits," repeated Mr. Block, surprised. "So how do you know it was them?"

"Fifteen student witnesses. They are pretty sure. The police are going to talk to them," explained Principal Peters.

The reporter shouted, "Could you confirm our reports of a mock shooting by some disgruntled students here at Balawood High?"

"Good. I am glad that I didn't go easy on those boys. We must enforce school policy, you know," said Supt. Block.

"Yeah, sure," said Principal Peters, who decided to refrain from any snide comments in response to the superintendent's change of heart.

The phone rang.

"Principal Peters here...Oh Channel 12...Trouble? No trouble," said Mr. Peters, repeating a few key phrases for Supt. Block's benefit. "Well, I am busy right now." Principal Peters dropped the receiver on his desk. "She hung up. That was a reporter from Channel 12," he explained to Mr. Block. "A crew is on its way here, it would seem," mumbled the principal.

"Oh, no. I have to leave here. They will think that something major has happened if I am here. I have to go," said Supt. Block.

"I will walk you out, " said Principal Peters.

"What are you going to say, Joe?" asked Mr. Block as both men headed for the back parking lot.

"It was just a prank by some kids. And we are checking into the matter and we will discipline the responsible parties appropriately according to school policy."

"What about the 911 call?" asked Supt. Block.

"I will just reassure the media that nothing happened...some kids with paint guns," continued Principal Peters.

"No, no...don't mention the word guns. And don't bring up the cheating incident with Ms. Blithers. Just hold off the media until I can meet with school counsel and get out a press release," advised the superintendent.

As Mr. Block and Mr. Peters exited the back door, they were greeted by two camera crews—one from Channel 6 and another from Channel 12. The television reporters stuck their microphones in the face of the administrators, and started pumping out questions, one after another.

"We know that there was a 911 call made by a student from inside this school earlier this morning."

"Could you confirm our reports of a mock shooting today by some disgruntled students here at Balawood?"

"Superintendent Block, we understand that you are neighbors with one of the suspects that allegedly participated in the assault against the teacher?"

"Ms. Blithers told us that the police have been here earlier today, and they were going to question these boys. Will you comment?"

"Is it school policy to allow suspended students to enter the school?"

"Is it true that one of the children allegedly involved in the assault was suspended for cheating only a few days ago?"

"Wasn't he the same boy that placed first in the Scholar League State Competition?"

Superintendent Block and Principal Peters stared into the cameras, and then at each other. How were they going to respond to these half-truths and implications? Principal Peters had

been so sure of himself only moments ago. Now he was concerned with damage control. He could already hear his phone ringing off the wall, as one parent after another questioned him on school security issues.

Supt. Block cleared his throat, and told the reporters that he was just as concerned as they were, if not more, about finding out what exactly happened, and that much of what was said was blown out of proportion.

Then one reporter asked, "Then why are you here today, if this is not a serious matter?"

Supt. Block paused for a second, collected his thoughts, and said, "I am not taking this matter lightly, but I just don't have all the facts yet. We will be issuing a press statement after some investigation. That's all I can say for now." Supt. Block pushed his way past the reporters and walked toward his car.

Engulfed by the media, Principal Peters stood dumbfounded on the back steps of the high school. He could feel his job drifting away from him. "What did I do wrong?" he thought. "What did I do wrong?"

Case Study Editor is Phylis West Johnson. She is an associate professor at Southern Illinois University, Dept. of Radio-TV, Mailcode 6609, Carbondale, IL 62901.

Response:
School Safety First, School Image Will Follow

by Randy J. Dunn

At first glance, the numerous problems presented in this case seem quite complex and difficult to sort out. But the foremost issue here is one of school safety and security. The public relations problems evident in this case—both with the community and the media—must really be a secondary consideration to be addressed by Principal Peters and the staff.

The fact that three students were able to gain access to the school with look-alike weapons (i.e., the paint ball guns) is a manifestation of the largest difficulty that must be addressed. If the school administrators in this case cannot address how such a drastic security breach could happen—and then take steps so that it cannot happen again—the other PR problems surrounding this case will look like minor annoyances compared with the climate created when parents believe that the school cannot guarantee basic safety for their children. Watch these parents go to the media then.

Given this, the best long-term community and media relations strategy would be to proactively and tangibly respond to the core problem of school security. This may be handled in a variety of ways, with a broad-based school safety committee involving numerous constituencies, or in close involvement with police and other

community agencies, or with a school violence prevention consultant. But the staff and school board's failure to address this key issue will follow it long after the specific details of the three freshman boys' reign of paint ball terror are long forgotten.

Of course, all of this work takes time and does little to address the short-term problems that Principal Peters still must face. He is correct to hold off the press until he can fully investigate the facts of this case. Granted, a "no comment" reply rarely works in these situations. But by calmly giving a minimal restatement of the facts that are apparent to everybody in the school by this time (and dispelling the initial rumors that inevitably follow), he can likely buy some additional time with an assurance that he will fully brief reporters when more of the facts are in. Supt. Block has the right basic approach, but demonstrated the wrong style and form—leaving Peters to clean up the mess with the reporters.

The facts that the boys seem to be "good" students (so much so that Tommy is on the Scholar League), that Ms. Blithers is a marginal teacher at best, that there are personal relationships among the players that complicate this case, and that Supt. Block seems to have his feet firmly planted in clay when it comes to student discipline—all of these circumstances are distractors for this case. Indeed, these and other things complicate the day-to-day work of administrators in virtually every school in this country. But as an administrator, one works on them, works through them, and works around them. Yes, all of these need to be tackled—but they are secondary, or even tertiary concerns, given the extant difficulties faced by Peters here.

And all of this does not change the basic facts of the case: An assault occurred and the boys need to be dealt with through both the juvenile justice and school discipline systems. Only after this should Principal Peters tackle the secondary issues (e.g., trying to remediate the teacher's poor performance or talking to Superintendent Block about the strain in their working relationship) that arise from this case. If Peters can find the fortitude to do this, however, we cannot predict with certainty that he will keep his job. This is difficult to do in even the best of circumstances. But will be able to lead with the assurance that he is doing everything possible to provide for the safety of his students.

The secondary problems presented by this case, then, seem to pale in comparison.

Dr. Randy J. Dunn is chair of the Dept. of Educational Administration and Higher Education at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale (Dept. Office: 618/536-4434).

Commentary

Boards Have a Policy Role Regarding School Violence

By Sharon Fissel and Donald B. Owen

Many consider crime and violence—especially in the public schools—one of the most serious issues plaguing society. Officials of school districts must have the authority and must take the initiative to deal with the prospect of violence in their schools.

Each school board must determine if

the district needs a board policy governing terroristic threats and acts.

If the board decides that such a policy is needed, the policy must be long-term, coordinated, clear and firm.

Using the definitions of "terroristic threat" and "terroristic act," as contained in the Pennsylvania Crimes Code for example, is crucial to the clarity and legality of this policy. Students and staff should be made responsible for reporting to a designated administrator any information or knowledge related to a possible or actual threat or act, **no matter how unlikely it may seem**. A chain of command for handling reports and incidents should be established, with the ultimate responsibility for notifying the police and recommending discipline delegated to the superintendent.

The policy should provide for a case-by-case review, allowing administrative flexibility and ensuring compliance with student rights requirements. Before the policy is adopted, district officials should coordinate with local law enforcement concerning notification and enforcement procedures.

The board may want to consider requiring a student violator to provide, prior to readmittance, documented evidence that he or she will not pose a further risk. Some districts have chosen to expand the policy to include staff members. Boards also may consider adding language in the student discipline code prohibiting terroristic threats and acts and stating the consequences.

After the board adopts a policy, the administration is responsible for implementing it. The policy must be distributed districtwide, including it in student, staff and parent handbooks, on posted notices and announcements. It should be discussed at assemblies and published in newspapers.

As an outgrowth of the policy, the district staff may conduct a safety audit to determine if essential elements are in place for responding to such a crisis. The district also may establish an advisory committee comprised of board members, school personnel, students, parents, community members, law enforcement officers and youth service agency representatives to review and evaluate existing safety and security measures.

Another policy consideration is zero tolerance for drugs and weapons, which has been a basis for some district's policies.

In 1998, a Dauphin County (Pa.) judge issued a decree requiring all schools in the county to report virtually all incidents of violence to the police. The basic premise is that all school violence is criminal in nature and should be dealt with by law enforcement officials. "The police should be called, the police should investigate and the police should decide," said the county's director of juvenile probation.

School district officials must conduct comprehensive research, solicit appropriate input and seek advice from the solicitor before the school board considers policies governing various types of violent, threatening behavior by students in schools and at school activities.

Sharon Fissel is director of policy services and Donald B. Owen is associate executive director for board development programs, both of school board and management services of the Pennsylvania School Boards Assn. (772 Limekiln Rd., New Cumberland, PA 17070). This article is reprinted from the association's PSBA *Bulletin*.

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They can supply a variety of photos for review and publication on a one-time basis for fees to be arranged depending on the nature of the use.

Mission Statement
The mission of *School Public Relations Journal* is to enhance student achievement and staff accomplishment. This is done by stimulating those people who operate schools to communicate with, and build relationships among, all people in the greater school district community.

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Scope

Articles are sought on topics such as internal communication and climate, employee motivation, parent involvement, partnerships, working with the news media, community participation, audits, surveying and polls, community service programs for students, communication training, advisory committees, volunteers, writing and speaking, publications, alumni associations, foundations, mentoring, photography, and related topics.

The overall goal of the *Journal* is to support efforts to enhance/foster student achievement and staff productivity, and to provide information to build public knowledge of the value and potential benefits of a sound basic education of our youth. We advocate the concept that the school public relations function must be based on fact and reality as compared to ideals and goals of educators and the community at large.

Style

We prefer the style used in the magazine *Phi Delta Kappan*. Kindly note:

1. **Do not** place last names of authors being cited and the year *within* the text. Number citations sequentially in the text; provide usual citations in **references following the article**.

2. Before the start of the article, include a summary of the scope and major findings of the article in one paragraph.

We encourage you to include photographs, drawings, and tables as appropriate.

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- Advise if the article has been published or is being considered elsewhere.
- Queries for articles on specific topics are welcomed.
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Quotes to Quote

If 10 people can complete a project in 10 days, then one person can complete the same project in one day...

John Hope

The early bird may get the worm,
but the second mouse gets the cheese...

Anon.

If you don't want to work, you'll have to work to earn enough money so you won't have to work...

Ogden Nash

When you win, nothing hurts...

Joe Namath

The only difference between a problem and a solution is that people understand the solution...

Charles Kettering

If at first you don't succeed, maybe you're doing it wrong...

Nick Polo

The school of experience has an unusual cheer—Ouch! Ouch! Ouch!...

J. Auman

You miss 100 percent of the shots you never take...

Wayne Gretzky

I intend to live forever—so far, so good...

Anon.

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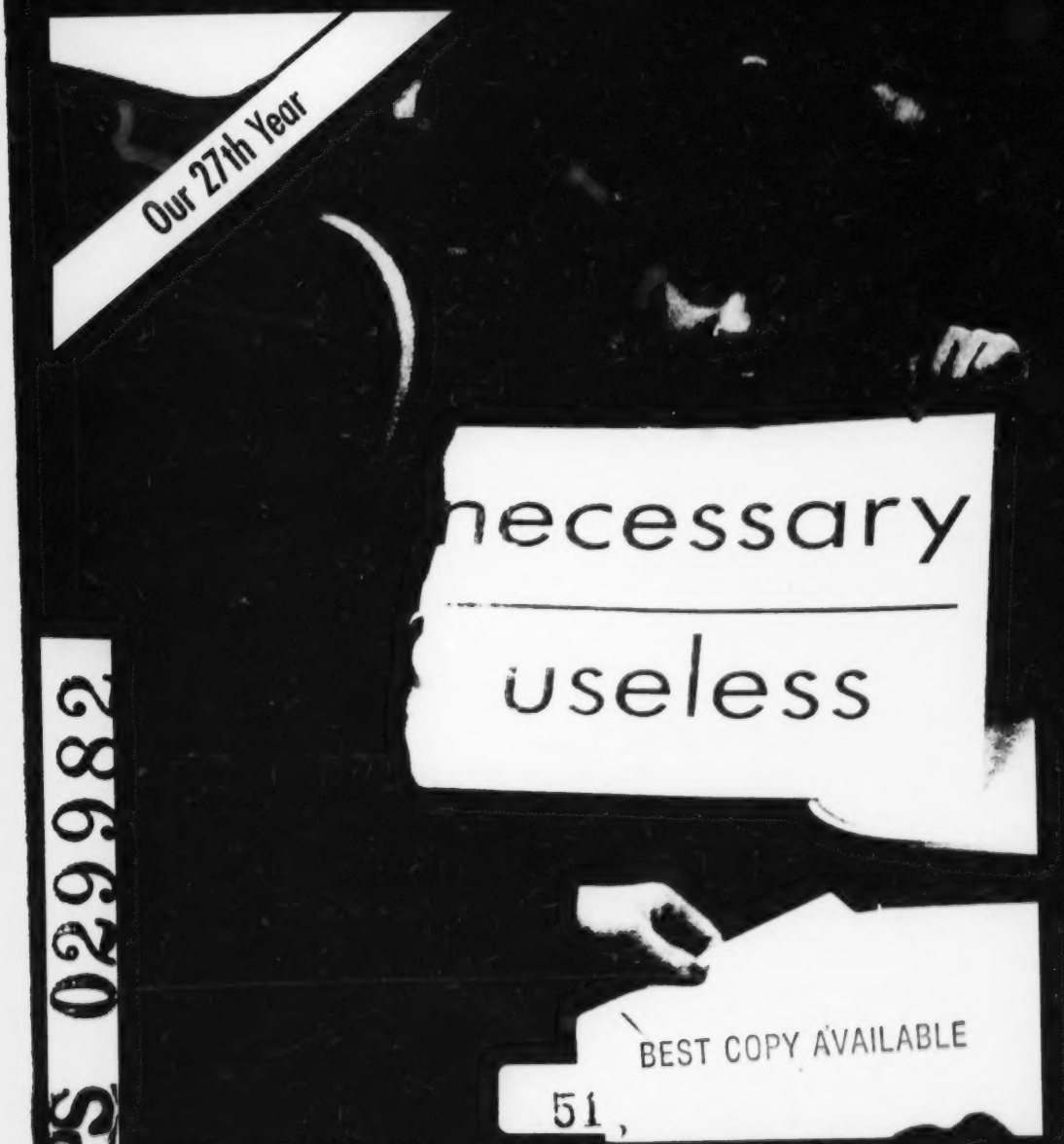
SCHOOL PUBLIC RELATIONS

Journal

Our 27th Year



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Formerly the Journal of Educational Relations

Promoting student achievement through positive school-home-community relationships Vol. 22, No. 2 • 2001

The Editor Ruminates

Show Me Your Skills

What skills should a high school graduate possess?

That question could be the theme of a workshop on educational renewal for your educators and teams of parents and citizens.

Better yet, one of the rules of the workshop would be that any skills attendees would propose would have to be *specific*.

For example, saying a graduate should be able to *read, write* and *use a computer* are worthy goals , but they are too general. A specific skill to the same ends would be to:

Write a one-page newsletter about a school club's members and their activities and produce the master copy on a school computer.

Here are some other specific skills we think a high school graduate should possess:

•Know how to play at least one lifelong recreational sport such as golf, tennis, or bowling.

•Be able to speak before a small group of people for two minutes without once saying **you know**, **I mean**, or **um**.

•Know how to organize or serve on a campaign for a candidate running for a seat on the school board or city council.

•Help conduct a survey about the effectiveness of the town's recycling program.

•Teach a group of 6th graders how to compose and take photos for a family album.

•Plan and purchase plants to install a decorative flower garden at the senior citizen center.

What on Earth do most of these skills have to do with secondary schooling, you may ask.

Whether one learns a vocation or becomes prepared to go to college, schools are a wonderful place for one to also learn how to become a useful citizen and a productive member of the local community in the near future.

Folks in Washington D.C. and your solons in the state capital are busy deciding what questions will be on the next battery of tests to impose on young people. In the meantime, why not ask your CEO to convene an advisory committee to develop your community's own list of worthwhile specific skills that have a little more relevance for young people as they approach adulthood.

Yo Joey

I review Joe Batory's new book in this issue. What he didn't say in the book, but did in an article he wrote for us, is this:

"My grounding in public relation principles while I was PR director for nine years was one of the significant factors that allowed me to survive as a school superintendent for 16 years."

He shares six techniques of people-relations that worked for him and might work for you. We'll run his article in our next issue.

Al Holliday

Albert E. Holliday
Editor-Publisher

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What Should Be the Role of Community in Character Education?

by Marvin W. Berkowitz, Philip Fitch Vincent and Linda McKay

Abstract

Two recent character education initiatives that reflect an understanding of the relevance and power of the community outside the school walls are described in this article. Ten general recommendations for incorporating community elements into a school-based character education initiative are presented. The authors conclude that character educators should pay attention to the broad community to increase the effectiveness of their initiatives.

Character education has a long and varied history, dating to colonial times in the United States,[1] but it can even be traced at least as far back as ancient Greece.[2] Wherever people have been concerned with how formal lessons and schooling can contribute to the development of social, emotional and moral characteristics in the youth of their society, character education has been an issue. Socrates died for his resolute dedication to "character education" of the youth of Athens.

Nevertheless, character education is presently as popular and frequent as ever. It is being implemented in individual classrooms, throughout schools, in entire school districts, and even across large urban regions and entire states. It is also being implemented in varied forms and through diverse processes.

As the research evidence comes in, it is clear that quality character education[3] is effective in promoting a broad range of positive character outcomes in students.[4] Quality character education includes shared governance, an explicit school-wide emphasis on character, and the promotion of a positive school culture. When implemented fully, such initiatives promote prosocial attitudes and behaviors, moral reasoning development, an avoidance of undesirable risk behaviors, bonding to school, and improved academic achievement.

However, there is often the temptation to implement in a more limited fashion, such as omitting stakeholder participation or avoiding staff development. In such cases, the desired effects are less likely to occur.

There is also the obvious challenge of finding the varied resources (e.g., time, funding) to make such an initia-

tive work.

In this day of focus on academic standards, many school leaders shy away from taking on the challenge of character education for fear that it will detract from their academic mission. Research, however, suggests that educators in schools and classrooms of character enhance academic motivation and performance.

One of the common strands in character education has been community. However, what is meant by community and how it is incorporated in character education is usually more limited than what is typically meant by community in general discussions of education.

Despite this common focus on building **community in schools** and classrooms in order to foster character development in students, there has been a substantial neglect of the **broader communities in which schools are located**. If students related the positive features of their classroom or school communities to their neighborhood communities, then the general neglect of the role of the broad community in education would not be a problem.

However, it is clear that this does not occur. Power and his colleagues report a telling incident in one Just Community high school. In this case, the school had developed to the point that students had developed expectations against theft within the school, based on expectations of trust among school members. But they were reticent to act against a student who was caught breaking into a home in the neighborhood during his lunch period because it was not part of "the community," which for them was limited to their immediate school community.[12] The school was understood as deserving of moral treatment, but the neighborhood was exempt from virtue because it was not part of the immediate school community.

Related areas of education and child development, such as drug prevention, have recognized the power of the broader community context in promoting child and adolescent development. Interventions are designed to go beyond the walls of the school and to incorporate diverse community resources, such as mass media and law enforcement. "In general, the effects obtained from these interventions tend to last longer than school programs alone...and, for some [drugs], they produce large effects."[14]

If the effects of drug prevention programs are strengthened by coupling school-based interventions with community interventions, then it seems likely that character education program effects can be significantly magnified by incorporating diverse community

What is Character Education?

Character education is the composite of those aspects of schooling that have an impact on the development of character in students. Character is the set of psychological characteristics of an individual that makes the person better able to understand, care about, and do that which is morally right.

Prominent aspects of school that have an impact on character are the behavior of adults in the school, peer and adult culture, the governance structure of the school, the school's explicit mission, the curriculum, and discipline policies and strategies.[15]

resources. Indeed, some character education initiatives are already moving in that direction.

Two Models of Community-Based Character Education

A. The Characterplus initiative in St. Louis is a 12-year-old regional initiative. The Characterplus mission states that creating and sustaining a productive approach to character education requires a partnership between the home, school and the broader community. In the St. Louis region, more than 30 public school districts are involved in the large-scale community-wide response to character education. A project of the Cooperating School Districts of Greater St. Louis, Characterplus integrates character education throughout the school day, including curriculum, discipline policies, after-school activities, and reform initiatives. Characterplus has long-standing relations with community organizations such as local media, law enforcement, businesses, and professional sports teams.

They have worked for nearly a decade with one of the local network TV affiliates on various projects. At first, this station joined the initiative by producing a Saturday morning story telling program ("Gator Tales") based on character traits chosen by people in local school districts. More recently, the same network joined with Characterplus and the St. Louis Rams football team to produce a video that uses Rams players to promote character along with a curriculum. These have been supplied to all schools in the Characterplus 35-district consortium. This TV station has also collaborated with local school districts, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, and all metropolitan police departments on a monthly student character award program, called "Do the Right Thing." To date over 6,000 young people have been nominated for this recognition.

Local businesses, such as Bank of America and Southwestern Bell, have offered financial support to establish an academy to train school principals in character education. The University of Missouri-St. Louis has also collaborated on this project, as has Webster University. (The first author is the inaugural Sanford N. McDonnell Professor of Character Education at UMSL and contributes much of his time to Characterplus initiatives, including funding and supervising a second character education academy for principals.) Between the two academies, about 50 principals are trained extensively each year at no cost to the participants or their schools.

One important goal was to find ways for local businesses to raise awareness for employees about the importance of talking to young people about good character. One school developed posters that demonstrated a business/school collaboration supporting character. The students took these posters to businesses of their choice for display in the community. Another business emphasized a character trait each month on their employees' paycheck stubs. Character education parent training was made possible through a grant from Monsanto Corporation.

Connection to local service organizations has brought another important resource to help schools support character education. From the beginning, local Lions Clubs joined with schools in the Lions-Quest training. This part-

nership brought financial and community support to help many schools begin the character education process. In 1997, the Rotary Club joined with a local high school to field test the Templeton Foundation's "Laws of Life Essay Contest." Through English classes, young people wrote essays about the laws upon which their lives should be based. This project is now being replicated throughout the metropolitan area.

Local chambers of commerce have been long-standing partners in bringing "Ethical Decision-making in the Workplace and Society",[15] a locally developed curriculum, to area schools. The curriculum includes a one-day symposium for high school students and area business representatives to look at how decisions are made and the importance of ethics in decision-making. This program is now available through the National Association of Secondary School Principals and is used nationally.

Joining with cultural institutions and libraries has been important in the success of "Increase the peace," a school-based project to promote understanding of the importance of settling differences peaceably. For example, students constructed "peace balls" of string that were later displayed at the St. Louis Science Center, where their scientific properties of length and weight were examined. This event became a city-wide youth celebration of peace. Local libraries collaborated by distributing student-designed bookmarks which, in art and words, depicted the students' personal heroes and their character traits.

Characterplus is based on the premise that values are transmitted to children 24 hours per day. Therefore effective character education requires a community that is united in ways they can pass on positive values. Parents and educators have consistently emphasized the need for broader community partnership to be a key priority of character education in the St. Louis area, so that school and home character efforts will be reinforced throughout the daily lives of children. This is the reason for such a long-standing and significant partnership between an educational organization like Characterplus and so many disparate community organizations.

B. A more recent community-wide character education initiative in Chattanooga, Tennessee, has similarly partnered with diverse community elements from its onset. The organizers of the **Chattanooga character education** initiative have had very strong support and participation from the community. The Maclellan and Benwood Foundations have provided financial support, which allowed for a full-time director of character education as well as training for more than 1,000 teachers and administrators (and continuing support from the second author as an outside consultant to the project). Their initial support also allowed for the con-

Character Education Information Sources

To learn of a variety of books and materials about character education, send a request to Character Development Publishing, PO Box 9211, Chapel Hill, NC 27515. 919-967-2110. Email respect96@aol.com.

vening of citizens to help guide the initiative, including determining the character traits that would be emphasized throughout the school district.

After determining those traits, the vision was presented to the Chattanooga Chamber of Commerce and the Chattanooga Rotary and Civitan Clubs. The Chamber and the Rotary and Civitan clubs in Chattanooga consist of community business and social leaders. It is highly desirable for an educational initiative that needs the support of the community to have the school superintendent or his/her appointee address groups of community leaders. A meeting was convened with these groups to express to them the importance of character education and the efforts the schools were going to take to bring character education to the forefront of the educational experience. The attendees were told the history of character education in the nation and why it is important to refocus on this important objective both in the schools and in the community. Additionally, they were presented with studies of which character traits employers were looking for in successful employees. They were also informed about what is needed of our children and adults in order to promote citizenship and civility. Finally, it was stated that any support from them would be greatly appreciated; however, the organizers never anticipated the level of support to be offered.

The operators of Eller Media, a national billboard company, agreed to design and market billboards on the school district's "character trait of the month." These billboards were placed

Continued on page 12

How to Foster Character Development in Schools

The following are 10 specific recommendations for what people in communities and community groups can do to support educators in fostering character development and, in doing so, help build healthy moral communities for all their citizens. We encourage communities and schools to add new ideas to this list to even more effectively collaborate to foster character development.

1. The superintendent of schools must be an active supporter of character education. Superintendents are frequently invited to give talks to community groups and audiences. Character education should be prominently highlighted in such presentations. When superintendents are asked to talk about the schools, they should spend half of their time on the importance of schools working with communities and families to reinforce the importance of character development. Perhaps they could share evidence of this effort in the schools.

Then they could turn to the academic goals of the school district. This would send a clear message to the educators and community members that character development and academics are equally important in a school environment.

2. The School Board must support the character development efforts of the schools and the community.[18] The Board should treat character education as an important

mission of the schools. This sends a powerful message to the community. The Board should also recognize the efforts of those in the community who are working to promote character and civility. This can be done by recognizing a "Citizen of the Month" from the community as well as the school during a School Board meeting. Members of the School Board should also be vocal about their support for character education throughout the community whether they are in session or not.

3. Community service organization members should be educated about the importance of character education and be invited to participate in the initiative. The school district's character "point person" should speak to all service organizations concerning how their members can support character education in the schools as well as the community. Members of the School Board, staff, PTA, etc. who belong to such organizations should advocate for their participation in the community-wide initiative. In many communities, such organizations play important roles in developing business and social relationships. Groups such as these are crucial in building business and community support for a character education initiative. Schools need financial as well as moral support and local businesses and philanthropists may be attracted through these service organizations to provide financial support for the initiative; for example, by sponsoring a school library section on character development and education or providing furniture for a resource center. Members of such organizations might also offer to send speakers in schools to address the importance of good character or to serve as mentors or tutors to individual students. Students could become involved in service work with such organizations, which would strongly support both service and service learning, routinely significant elements in character education. What is important is that key social groups and organizations give support to the character education efforts of the schools and community as a whole.

4. Community youth groups should partner with the schools in promoting character development. Youth organizations, such as the 4H Clubs, YMCA, YWCA, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, etc., have character development as a central and explicit part of their missions. A consortium of such groups in the Kansas City area began an initiative called "Building Life Skills" that focused on training volunteer and professional youth group leaders to be more effective character educators. Many students already belong to such organizations, so the character message at school gets reinforced outside of school.

5. Faith communities must be involved in assisting the schools in their character efforts. Several years ago, religious leaders in Cumberland County, North Carolina agreed to preach once a month, using their interpretation of their holy books, on the character trait that was being emphasized in the schools. All faith communities were involved. Other faith organizations have worked with schools on how their members might tutor students as examples of model-

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ing service as well as having students assist faith communities in their service efforts, such as soup kitchens. For children who have a strong faith background, the efforts of the faith communities help reinforce the school and community efforts.

6. All community sponsored recreational opportunities must transmit the character message. Sportsmanship at such events is often distressing, and much of the lack of sportsmanship is coming not from the playing field but from the stands. As a nation we are failing to teach the importance of sportsmanship.[19,20,21] County or community recreational associations should form committees to determine what good sportsmanship is and how adults can model this to children. The list of traits and practices should be given to all coaches, parents, and athletes. They should hear from the recreational organization if they are modeling poor character to our young athletes, and if they persist they should not be welcome at such events. The message should be clear that the character development of our children is a higher priority than a parent's right or need to vent in public. Coaches, trainers, athletic directors, and others who work in youth recreational activities should be trained in character development and there should be a partnership between such individuals in the community and their counterparts in the schools. Local professional athletic teams should be enlisted to support a community consensus on character and sportsmanship, as the St. Louis Rams have done in partnering with the Characterplus initiative.

7. Public civility and character should be endorsed and modeled. Attendees at public meetings should strive to model civility. County Commissioners, City Council or School Boards often must consider controversial issues. Despite the controversial topics they must address, members of public groups must work to maintain civility in their deliberations. All members of boards must strive to act with civility and caring towards themselves and their fellow citizens. They must seek to be moral models even if those around them are failing. In addition, they must take time to recognize and honor community members who exhibit moral virtue towards others. This sends a message that virtue and standards of excellence matter. We train and ask students to disagree in a civil manner, to be supportive in contentious classroom discussions, and to learn to resolve conflicts in a respectful manner. When they see public discourse that falls short of this, it weakens the effectiveness of what they experience in school. Moral discussion is a critical element in effective character education, but it must be done in a respectful, reflective, and civil manner. When communities model this, children are more likely to follow suit.

8. Owners and managers of media outlets should be encouraged to recognize acts of good character in the schools and in the community. It is a common criticism that managers of the media focus on bad news and ignore good news. A balanced

approach is needed. Reporters and editors have an obligation to report the news, but that also should include the good news coming from the schools and communities. They can celebrate good character in children, recognize the efforts of students in service learning, and report the efforts of schools in creating a more civil climate. They can celebrate those in our community who add a touch of civility to the community. This type of news reporting can provide a balanced view of a school and a community. Reporters can also publicize the community-based character education effort, and they can be a vehicle for direct education, for example with public service announcements.

9. Business owners and leaders must take the time to recognize and celebrate good character among their employees and to invest in schools and youth character. Most employers report that people who are respectful of others, responsible in their work, and caring towards others make good employees. Intelligence is important but intelligence without good character may result in an employee who has the potential to do the job well, but, because of attitude, is unable or unwilling to do the job. To create an attitude in the workplace that character matters we should take time to recognize this in our employees. Reminders about the importance of character can appear in paychecks, bulletins, newsletter, and during meetings. Establishing a corporate ethics program also sends the message that character counts. Clearly business people can also promote the school's character mission, support employees in doing so, and offer financial assistance by sponsoring specific character education projects.

10. Community members must understand that character is formed first and foremost by our first teachers - our families. We must do whatever we can to help families in their efforts to raise children who "know, love and do the good"[22] as a community and ultimately as a nation. Educators can offer suggestions on what families can do with their children to promote respect, responsibility, and caring. As the Character Education Partnership states in one of its Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education, "The school must recruit parents and community members as full partners in the character-building effort."[23] Community-based parenting organizations that help parents prepare their children for school and life in general should be enlisted in the character education effort. In St. Louis, Characterplus has partnered with Parents as Teachers, an international organization that trains community members to train parents how to more effectively influence the character formation of their preschool aged children. The forthcoming revision of their 3-5 curriculum is going to highlight character development. Schools need parents and parents need schools to achieve the optimum in youth character development.

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in high visibility areas throughout the county. Many businesses rented a billboard, with some renting several. Eller Media has sold and displayed on average 15 billboards a month promoting character over the past two years. It is clear that they are having an impact, because the school district receives calls from people driving through town, seeing the billboards, and wanting to know what is occurring.

Bi-Lo Grocery and Coca-Cola sponsored a monthly insert the last Sunday of each month in the local newspaper, *The Chattanooga Times/Free Press*, as well as providing the inserts to all stu-

The 2nd Face of Community in Character Education

When discussing character education, the term *community* refers to something that happens **within the walls of a school** or even within an individual classroom. There is a long and important tradition of educational concern for building community within a school[5,6] and for examining harmful aspects of flawed community in a school.[7]

In essence, schools are (or should be) communities in this sense. It is clear from the research on character education that building within-school community is a critical catalyst for the effective promotion of students' character development.

Sponsors of the **Child Development Project**, a well-researched and intensively implemented character education model, have discovered that the desirable effects of their intervention depend upon students coming to perceive their schools as "caring communities"[8] A central theme of their comprehensive elementary school reform model is building community **within the individual classroom** as well.[9,10] Furthermore, their research has demonstrated that class meetings, a key ingredient in fostering classroom community, is one of the most important variables in effective character education. The field of constructivist education has also highlighted classroom atmosphere as critical to children's social and emotional development.[11]

At the secondary level, another character education program, the **Just Community Schools**, relies heavily on building a moral atmosphere in the alternative high schools officials have established and mentored.[12] Their primary focus is on school culture and collective norms among school members. In other words, the development of a positive community in these alternative schools is considered the critical ingredient in promoting the development of student moral reasoning.

Related areas of education report a similar emphasis on community building. For instance, the prevention field has revealed that attachment to school is an important deterrent for adolescent risky behaviors.[13,14,15]

dents. This eight-page insert promotes the character trait that will receive a concentrated focus during the following month.

Through the help of *The Times/Free Press*, the initiative staff has also designed their own posters supporting the *trait* of the month. During 1998-99, they used the same posters for the elementary, middle and high schools. During the 1999-2000 school year they used pictures of local children for the elementary schools and local and international heroes from present day and the past for the middle and high schools. The posters for the 2000-2001 school year feature district students. Many organizations throughout the Chattanooga area have sponsored these posters, which are displayed in all classrooms as well as through the common areas of the schools.[16]

The faith community has also been involved in promoting and supporting character education. In 1998, more than 1,000 letters were sent to ministers and religious youth leaders. These letters invited these leaders to a meeting to learn more about the district's character education initiative. Close to 100 faith leaders attended the meeting. They represented a broad variety of denominations and viewpoints. They all acknowledged that they had an important role to play in helping to forge the character of youth. Each minister, rabbi, priest, or other religious leader was asked to use his/her interpretation of scripture to preach one sermon a month on the school district's character trait of the month. At the conclusion of the presentation they acknowledged that the schools must also be involved in fostering youth character. This is particularly important given the historically adversarial relationships between churches and public schools in America. The 96th American Assembly report *Matters of Faith: Religion in American Public Life* lists as one of its six recommendations on education:

> "local schools should develop character education plans in cooperation with parents and religious leaders together with teachers and school administrators to ensure that widely-held moral values are reflected and taught in the mission and environment of the school."[17]

Consistent with this mandate, the attending clergy were also asked to help organize tutorials in the schools and just visit the schools and support the children. This has proven to be a successful partnership. Educators throughout the county have reported an increase in people coming from the churches to the schools to tutor children.

Conclusions

Research from related disciplines suggests that the effectiveness of character education may be increased by broadening the conception of community from community **within the walls of the school** to include the residential-business community elements as partners in the character education endeavor. Indeed, this has been done in character education programs like Characterplus in St. Louis and the recent Chattanooga initiative.

Although parents are the key to character development of children, we all have a role in promoting character as a basis for success in the future of our country.[18] Members of every organization within a community can and

must contribute. The goal should be to wrap character in a community wide package that is opened and practiced daily and permeates throughout the community. It must become part of the "ethos" or life of the child, parent, and community.

If we commit to such an effort, we can surely help alter the character of our communities.

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Editor's Note

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PHOTO GALLERY: David Clohessy..

Young people—advise them to enjoy themselves now. These are 'the good ole' days' that they'll talk about 40 years from now.

Don Vetter

Provide School and Community Orientation to Retain Your Teachers and Staff

by M. Scott Norton

Editor's Note:
Numerous studies indicate that poor workplace conditions are the primary cause of teacher loss. This article provides guidelines for district officials to design and implement an ongoing orientation program, especially for novice teachers (and other employees as well).

When a school loses a quality member of its teaching staff, it results in a loss of both monetary and intellectual capital. Best estimates are that a replacement costs 25% of the worker's salary. That's $7,500 for a teacher making $30,000 and a bill of $75,000 if the district loses just 10 of its faculty. Monetary costs are incurred for the recruiting and hiring of replacements. School administrators are required to attend to the hiring, assigning, orientation and development of replacements.[1]

And, the organizational climate of the school often is disrupted when high turnover occurs because the efforts to develop positive interpersonal relationships and collaborative support networks in the school system and community for the purpose of delivering effective learning environments are thwarted.

But money isn't the only loss and perhaps not even the most important one. Teacher turnover results in the loss of intellectual capital as well. But are the best teachers the ones who are leaving the classroom? This appears to be the case with those teachers who leave education voluntarily. Olson[11] found that novice teachers who had scored in the top quartile on college entrance exams were nearly twice as likely to leave the profession (26%) than those who scored below the top quartile (14%). And, new teachers who scored the highest on the SAT and ACT exams were twice as likely to leave education as those with lower scores. Other studies of teachers who have left the classroom voluntarily support this contention. Of those teachers who voluntarily left teaching in an Arizona study, two-thirds of them had received performance evaluations from their princi-

pals of average to superior.[3] In a North Carolina study of teacher attrition between the years of 1978 and 1996, one-third of 81,000 teachers left the profession by the end of the fifth year. Furthermore, 44 percent of those who left had graduated from the top one-fourth of their states' colleges.[12]

Why Teachers Leave the Profession

Inadequate salary and poor working conditions, and ineffective human resources practices are among the leading reasons mentioned most frequently for teacher turnover. Some argue that salaries and benefits for teacher personnel simply are too low to attract and retain quality people. On the other hand, numerous studies point to poor workplace conditions rather than salary as the primary cause of teacher loss. For example, in 1999, Weiss reported that "adverse workplace conditions may affect new teachers and intentions to stay and may leave an indelible imprint on the structure and quality of teaching itself."[13]

Positive workplace conditions have been shown to be effective and less costly way of increasing teacher retention. A study by the National Center for Educational Statistics[8] found that work conditions such as administrative leadership and support, school climate, teacher autonomy in the classroom, student behavior, and parental support are directly related to job satisfaction. Furthermore, the more favorable the conditions, the higher the satisfaction. Each of these factors showed stronger relationships with job satisfaction than salary and benefits.

Some teachers find themselves in a schools with a poor climate, do not receive support from parents and the administration, and are assigned to teach in areas outside their subject-matter field. These teachers often become disenchanted and move to work in other fields. In addition, strong professional growth programs that emphasize the employee as a lifelong learner have been successful, as are programs that provide individualized support to teachers experiencing burnout.[7] Other studies have identified demographic characteristics common to those individuals who decide to leave the profession In one study[4] the authors identified "leavers" as those under 40 years of age, had few or no dependent children, had recent degrees, were not fully certified in their main teaching assignment, were relatively inexperienced, were employed parttime, earned lower salaries and had a change in marital status. Another study found the highest attrition rates among two groups--new teachers and the aging workforce.[1]

It is not the purpose here to address in detail the need to give renewed attention to the human resources function as a means for reducing the loss of teacher personnel. However, there certainly is a need to do so.

We must look at the human resources function in new and different ways. Teacher loss, for example, has been attributed in part to short-sighted recruitment and selection practices.

Factual information regarding career development opportunities for new employees seldom are addressed. Just the implementation of a quality staff orientation program appears to have great promise for reducing turnover.[9]

Orientation practices hold important implications for teacher retention and thus the remainder of this article focus-

es on that contention.

Orientation and Its Impact on Teacher Retention

The orientation process has, as its primary purpose, the introduction of new staff members to their school and community responsibilities. An effective orientation program enhances the chances for teaching success. It serves as the link pin between systematic recruitment and selection and subsequent staff development activities.

Orientation efforts are based on the premise that employees should be provided with supportive personal assistance and given information about the school, the school system, and opportunities for them to achieve their personal career goals. When these occur, the formation of a realistic set of role expectations becomes possible and, as a result, the rate of teacher retention increases. While the first entry of employees into the school system requires special orientation considerations, the process should not be limited to new personnel nor is it a "first of the year only" activity. Rather it must be on-going and ultimately link with the professional development human resources process.

Two authors examined the concerns of preservice and novice teachers as it relates to improving orientation programs and reducing turnover.[10] They found that increased sensitivity to the needs of this population may improve teacher retention, as this is a critical period in a teacher's career. Unfortunately, many of the teachers in this study reported that their needs were not being addressed.

Teaching personnel who hold a high level of job satisfaction are far more likely to remain in teaching. One author found orientation practices relating to personal assistance were the best single predictor of all morale predictors for new personnel.[2] There was a significant relationship between orientation practices and morale.

Carefully planned programs of personnel orientation have been known to raise retention rates from 50 to 85 percent[6], an amazing outcome. And, teachers who have not participated in a structured mentoring program as part of their orientation are almost twice as likely to quit teaching after their first three years as those who do so.[11] Weiss reported that teachers who participated in a formal orientation program were more likely to establish strong commitment to teaching and continue their professional learning, a significant finding.[15]

Implementing an Effective Orientation Program

Effective orientation programs are founded on several guiding principles:

1. Orientation is a planned process that is based on school/community objectives related to its human resources function.

These objectives include:

- encouraging quality persons to apply in the district,
- implementing the effective transition of new personnel into their roles in the school/community,
- understanding of and commitment to school/community purposes,
- reducing problems that inhibit chances of teacher success,
- identifying human talent and

An effective orientation program enhances the chances that teachers will be successful, and the rate of teacher retention increases.

deploying it wisely,

• acquainting employees with the school district and school community, and

• providing information that fosters a healthy organizational climate that enhances student achievement.

The importance of orientation concerning the local community needs special emphasis. Writers have underscored the importance of community adjustment on the part of teachers.[11] They note that evidence on staff stability strongly demonstrates that community acceptance is an important element for people encouraging teachers to stay. Bonding with people in the local community can make a profound difference to teacher turnover.

2. Policies that guide and support the orientation process are provided through responsive action of the school board. The adoption of a personnel policy on staff orientation by the school board serves the purpose of making it a matter of paramount importance. Such policy sets the stage for followup administrative actions needed to implement effective orientation programs and establishes a basis for administrative action.

An example of an orientation policy and accompanying administrative regulation from one school district:

HUMAN RESOURCES

Orientation Policy--Certificated Employees (4230.1)

Orientation of certificated employees new to the school district or new to a specific school will be the responsibility of the Human Resources Division with assistance of the principal of the local school, other district administrators and appropriate community personnel as determined by the HR unit. The primary purpose of the orientation program is to introduce new staff members to their school and community responsibilities and to enhance the effectiveness of teaching personnel in the classroom. Orientation services should begin at the outset of the applicant's contact with the district and continue for as long as the employee and the district view them as necessary.

Orientation Regulations--School Building Basis (4230.1)

Each building principal is responsible for the orientation of certificated employees new to the school. Principals should give information and directions to new employees in regard to the following areas:

1. the specific school setting--facilities, resources, student demographics, community make-up, community resources, district policies and regulations, and district/school goals.

2. roles, responsibilities and relationships—job description, performance

evaluation procedures, formal and informal relationships surrounding the position, channels of communication, personal counseling services, and employee assistance programs.

3. the development of skills and understandings—instructional program objectives, student testing and grading information, technological services and support, teaching materials, conditions of work including teacher workload and career development opportunities.

3. The primary responsibility for the coordination of the orientation process should be vested in the central human resources unit of the school district; its implementation is shared with local school units and other school/community agencies.

The central human resources unit serves an important role in designing and implementing a specific plan for the orientation of personnel. Program purposes, budget needs, program content, delivery methods, individualization and personalization strategies, and the delegation of program responsibilities are included in this responsibility. Since the orientation process encompasses both preemployment and post-employment dimensions, a variety of personnel must be involved in those pre-employment activities generally provided between the initial contact of the applicant with the school district and the time the individual assumes an assignment in the system. Although it is appropriate to have a special block of time allocated to orientation at the outset of the school year, it is best viewed as a continuous activity. Post-employment orientation is implemented following candidacy and focuses on the provision of a successful transition of the teacher into a specific role assignment and continues for as long as the employee and the school view it as necessary.

Both group and individualized activities are used in the orientation process; specific attention is given to personalizing the program activities provided.

Studies of effective orientation programs tend to support the inclusion of informational topics such as those set forth in the policy/regulation example in number 2 above. In addition, orientation programs must give special attention to other special needs of beginning teachers. Thus, information must be provided concerning administrative routines, student discipline, mentoring program services, financial counseling, student regulations, office procedures and available secretarial services, responsibilities of faculty members, role of the school in the community, inservice opportunities and other information based on the assessment of the individual teacher's questions and personal interests.

Sensitivity to learning and addressing the needs of novice teachers may improve teacher retention, as teachers with high levels of job satisfaction are the most likely to remain in teaching.

Ways and Means of Personalizing the Orientation of Personnel

How might the orientation of personnel be made me individualized and personal? These are possible ways to gain a sense of what prospective and employees need and would want to know:

- Face-to-face contacts,
- The use of questionnaires to learn the kinds of information that might be most helpful to the prospective teacher,
- Immediate follow-up of initial inquiries of job applicants,
- Effective mentorship assignments,
- Briefing sessions and one-on-one conferences,
- Small group sessions,
- Specific attention to the common problems that face new teachers, and community and school district tours.

Results of these contacts can be analyzed and program activities determined that will provide the assistance of most benefit to each person concerned.

Webb and Norton[11] point out that teachers are adult learners and that orientation and staff development activities must use the basic principles that facilitate optimal learning and growth for them. Thus, in the implementation of orientation sessions with teachers:

- Teachers must have a voice in setting the goals, content, experiences and evaluation of the activities that take place,
- Teachers are individual learners; each one brings a varied background of experiences and knowledge to any learning situation,
- Teachers must be able to see the value of any learning session; the teacher must see how the activity will be applicable to their work and the resolution of problems that they face in their position, and
- They need to see tangible outcomes from the activities and experiences.

Summary

The matter of teacher supply and demand is high on the list of problems facing school districts nationally. Efforts to keep quality personnel in the classroom have become a concern of paramount importance. Suggestions for meeting the problem of teacher turnover include those of increasing salary and benefits for teachers and improving working conditions. The need for taking a new look at the personnel function for reducing teacher loss is emphasized in this article. Specifically, the need to provide a comprehensive, individualized and personal program of orientation for teachers has been argued.

Research is clear that effective orientation programs result in the improvement of job satisfaction and reduce teacher loss. Effective orientation programs are facilitated by adopted board policy that serves to support their implementation in a planned, organized and collaborative way. Effective orientation programs are comprehensive in the consideration of the school/community setting, roles and responsibilities of professional staff and the development of skills and understandings that foster the likelihood of teacher success. The importance of "community adjustment" has been underscored by several authorities. Bonding with people in the local community can make a profound difference

to teacher turnover. "It is hard to avoid the conclusion that lack of proper induction contributed in a major way to the reason one in six quit teaching during their first or second year of service...the creation of a good fit between teacher background/preparation and the demands of the appointment is the principle which induction should be designed."[11]

It is quite clear that a planned, structured program of support for teachers new to a school can reduce teacher loss.

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PHOTO GALLERY: Michael Siluk....

The best provision for old age is education

Aristotle

From the Boiler Room

by Gus, the custodian at Eastside Grammar

I was takin' a coffee break in the boiler room this mornin', thinkin' on my job and how it seems like yesterday that I was just a rookie here at Eastside. In truth, it was near 30 years ago that Mr. Keck and I started working for this district.

Me and the principal have been through a lot together, and I had to wonder why we stayed here instead of lollygagging around trying to find a better job. I wondered why we were happy to be responsible for Eastside rather than hopping from one place to another, bein' sloppy in our work, and gettin' out just ahead of the pink slip.

You know that whenever I get great thoughts, Mr. Keck is bound to show up. Today was no different. He come bounding in the boiler room.

"Well, Gus," he said, "what's on the burner for today?"

"Let's talk jobs," I said before he could grab my chocolate peanut covered donut. "Why have we stayed here at Eastside for almost 30 years?"

"Well, Gus," he said, "I'll bet we stayed here partly due to the kind of work we do. It's interesting. It's never dull. Something's always happening, and we are always challenged. What do you say to that?"

Obviously, I agreed with him, citing how we were challenged with "modern math" in the 60s, all that accountability and consumerism in the 70s, and now all the reform of the 80s. I never covered the year we had the attack of dandelions, or the time the plumbing went the wrong direction.

"Then, too, Gus, I believe the board and the superintendent feel all of us here at Eastside are important. They seem to take an interest in us and our efforts. That always helps, doesn't it?"

What could I say? Of course, they are interested in us. We raised the reading scores in fifth grade, had more parents come to Open House, and most of our area voted in favor of the last bond issue. What's more, I had all the snow shoveled from the front walk just before the last neighborhood board meeting where our parents decided to help pass the referendum.

"Gus, you and I never seem to get bored with our work. That, in itself, keeps us here," Keck related.

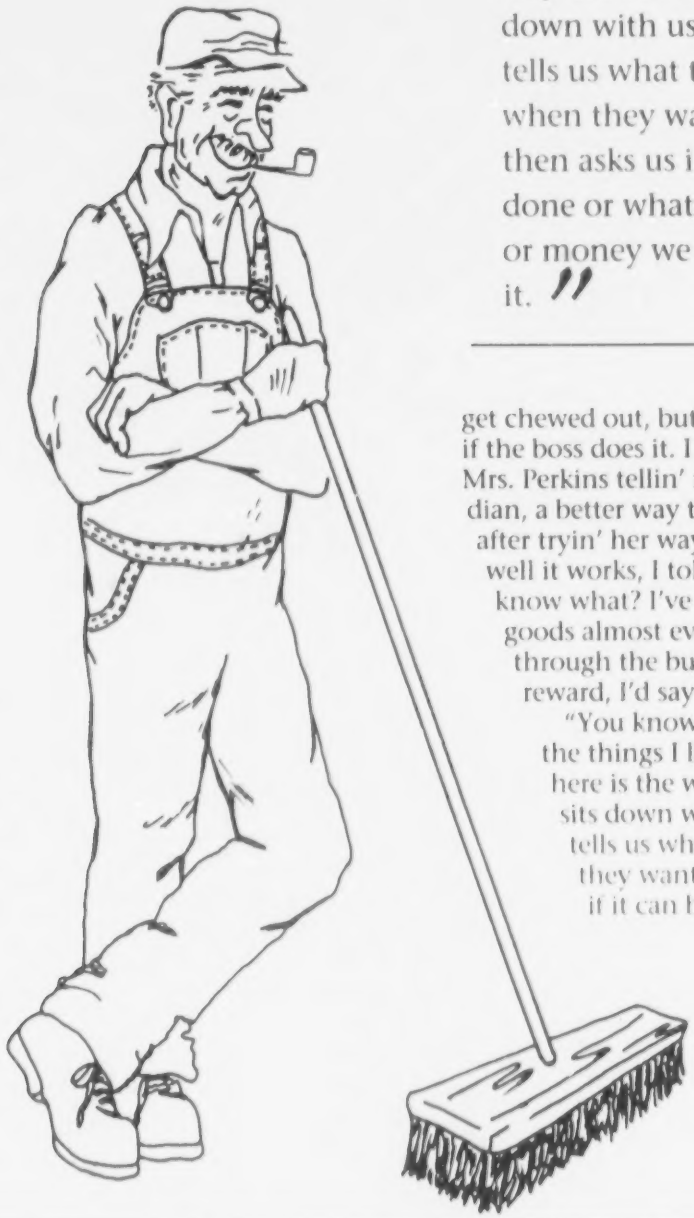
Bored? Who has time to get bored around here? If Bessie Waite doesn't need her sink drained, the PTA president is looking for one more table and six chairs. At the same time three kids from Ms. Alright's class need help with a clean-up project. Mr. Keck wants a shine up on the front hall, and to top it off the Missus calls to find out where we're eatin' tonight—Wendy's or Mac's. No, we don't get bored around here.

"I'll tell you this, too, Gus," Keck went on, "people let us know what they like and dislike about our work. We never have to find out through the

grapevine. Folks tell us what we need to do to improve. But more important, they reward us when we do well. Boy, that makes a job nice."

Am I going to argue? No one likes to

"You know, Mr. Keck, one of the things I like about working here is the way the central office sits down with us custodians, tells us what they want, when they want it, and then asks us if it can be done or what extra time or money we need to do it."



get chewed out, but at least it's honest if the boss does it. I was real upset with Mrs. Perkins tellin' me, the head custodian, a better way to get tile clean. But after tryin' her way and findin' how well it works, I told her "thanks." You know what? I've had fresh baked goods almost every time she comes through the building. Not a bad reward, I'd say.

"You know, Mr. Keck, one of the things I like about working here is the way the central office sits down with us custodians, tells us what they want, when they want it, and then asks us if it can be done or what extra time or money we need to do it. Nothin' is worse than unreasonable deadlines, arbitrary decisions, and us a sittin' around trying to

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> "We're expected to do a certain amount of work and are fairly rewarded for it, but a lot of us here at Eastside go the extra mile because our work is appreciated."

figure out how to do it. I like the way plans get made around here."

Keck said he agreed. Said he enjoyed being "a part of the action, the decisions, and the effort."

Of course I told Mr. Keck about the status we get from our work here at Eastside. Heck, I can go anywhere in town and they all say, "There's Gus, head honcho over to Eastside."

Mr. Keck has status, too. He gets to see all the salesmen that come by. He gets to resolve all the staff problems. And people call him for information they need. All the civic groups seem to want Keck, too. Sure, we have status on this job.

"What about the work load, Gus? You know a lot of people don't like their work. They think they're being overworked and underpaid. They feel the leadership is milking them. With us it's not like that. We're expected to do a certain amount of work and are fairly rewarded for it, but a lot of us here at Eastside go the extra mile because our work is appreciated."

Well, I know that's true. The Missus and I were invited to a special dinner and fashion show put on by the PTA. The Missus gets flowers when I'm late cleanin' up after neighborhood meetings. Mr. Keck got his picture in the paper for being this year's "Civic Citizen," and our school was featured in the state school board journal as havin' the top school-community involvement plan. Yep, it's good here.

"Gus, I have to get back to the office," Keck said, "but you know the real reason we've stayed here and enjoyed being here is because we are successful here. We've had our problems, but we've solved them. We made growth. We've been challenged. We've done well, Gus, done well by our district and school, done well by us. I guess that's reason enough to still be here at Eastside."

Hey! What am I to say? Mr. Keck should know; he's the principal.

"Gus" is the creation of two university professors and a principal, and their tales of Gus' wisdom have appeared as a regular feature of the Illinois School Board Journal. David Carr, a professor at Northern Illinois University, has been a co-author of all the columns. Clifford Chaffee of the same university was first co-author; Richard Smalter, an elementary school principal for North Boone schools in Illinois, is the current co-author.

A collection of 36 of the early columns is available for $9 (no purchase orders) from the Illinois Association of School Boards, Publications, 1209 South Fifth St., Springfield IL 62703.

PHOTO GALLERY: Michael Siluk

Why is it that the wrong way always seems to be the more reasonable way?

George Moore

How to Deal with Difficult School Board Members

By Barbara K. Given

This article should be of value to present or prospective members of public school boards of directors, although the content applies to anyone who works alongside other people. —Ed.

Is there a person on your school board you can't seem to connect with, who ignores your ideas, and refuses to see things your way? The problem might stem simply from a difference in learning styles.

"How can I make a difference on the school board when those jerks won't listen to me?" thought Henry after a lengthy "debate" about selling prime school property to a developer–actually, it was more like a polite shouting match, and Henry felt like punching a couple of people more than once. "Why are they so difficult?" he muttered while driving home.

What Henry fails to understand is that it take two to "tangle" and that "tangling" may be based on differences in learning style. Why is it difficult to work with some people and a joy to work with others? Clearly, there are many factors, but a major reason may be how differently people process the same information.

Fortunately, Henry can learn to work with difficult board members and anyone else whose response patterns differ from his. Adapting to others' patterns of interaction may feel like wearing oversized clothes, but if Henry wants them to embrace his point of view, shuffling around in their learning styles might be essential.

What's a learning style?

Learning style pioneers Rita and Kenneth Dunn give this definition: "Learning style is the way each learner begins to concentrate on, process, and retain new and difficult information."

It is the rather stable way people react to input. If two people hear the same thing differently, think about it differently, and then communicate it in ways foreign to the other, problems occur.

Learning style is associated with biological structures of the brain, molded by development into a set of personal

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The less successful the individual is at getting his or her views understood, the more important it is to accommodate the learning-style preferences of others.

characteristics. These differing characteristics make the same methods of working with one person ineffective for others.

Learning-style preferences differ significantly from one person to another. The stronger the preference, the more important it is to provide compatible input and feedback. Accommodating individual learning-style preferences through complementary input and feedback has a high probability for increasing positive interactions. Most school board members can learn to use learning styles as a cornerstone of their interactions.

This next statement is the hooker: The less successful the individual is at getting his or her views understood, the more important it is to accommodate the learning-style preferences of others.

A good place to begin is understanding differences between our style preferences and those of others. This understanding can prompt effective alternative communication approaches. Peter Senge, in his book *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, notes that people in conflict tend to focus on getting away from what **they don't want** rather than on creating what **they do want.** Consequently, when working with difficult people, the tendency is to move away and ignore the source of conflict, respond as if threatened–the fight-or-flight reaction. Have you noticed who does the moving away in your interactions? You, the other person, or both of you?

Members of an effective school board work in reasonable harmony toward a shared vision of the school district. That harmony becomes more likely when members have an understanding of learning styles and the role they play in how we feel, think, respond to our environments, and interact. Yes, you're thinking, but I though learning styles pertained to kids. Are they effective for adults, too?

An analysis conducted on 36 experimental studies completed at 13 different universities revealed that when learning style preferences were matched, college and other adult learners showed **greater gains** than elementary or secondary school learners.

Sensory preferences.

Does the difficult person need to see, hear, touch, or walk around the information to truly appreciate your point of view? If he needs to see it and the information is presented orally, then only bits and pieces will be heard. If she is tactile and there is nothing to handle, manipulate or play with, then the information may not "feel" right.

Think about a time when you were learning a new computer program or attempting to program your VCR to record a particular program. Did you

read the manual carefully before beginning and then follow the directions in a step by step sequence? Or, did you look at the pictures without reading the directions? Perhaps you opened all the packages and handled the pieces until you figured out how they fit. Or did you ask someone to show you what to do? The human tendency is to believe others want information provided in ways that are most comfortable to us, but if the variance is great, so, too, will be the tension.

For example, if you are a **visual-tactile** learner, you probably need flow charts, diagrams, and illustrations you can touch, trace with your finger, and look at from different angles. If you receive **oral** descriptions, then chances of your grasping the subtleties of the discussion without visual aids are remote.

Like children, adult learners retain only a portion of what they absorb through their senses. In fact, Magnesen found that adult learners retain only 10% of what they read, 20% of what they hear, 30% of what they see, 50% of what they see and hear, and 70% of what they say. With practice and talk about the *personal significance* of what is presented, adults can increase their memory retention to 90%, Magnesen discovered.

This research clearly suggests that when the preferred sensory modalities of difficult people are taken into account, they absorb more and respond with greater comfort than when presented the same information with disregard for their preferences.

That sounds great, but how do you find out what a person's sensory preferences are?

Bandler and Grinder developed an entire business around "reading" the sensory preferences of others. Their Neurolingustic Programming business focuses on observing how people express themselves in speech patterns. Visual learners reportedly use phrases like "**I see what you mean**" and "**It looks good to me**," while auditory learners substitute **hear** and **sounds** for **see** and **looks**. Tactile and kinesthetic learners express themselves with words, like **feel, grabs**, and **moves**.

When Bandler and Grinder used language similar to what they heard, those individuals were more likely to respond positively to requests than if the preferred modality was ignored.

The whole versus parts.

In addition to sensory factors, some people want an overview of the whole issue and what impact it may exert on the school division and community before they study the details. When they were youngsters in a geography class studying land features of their state, these adults probably needed to see the pulldown map and a globe of the world, then the continent, country, state, and their town before making sense from details. By contrast, others want a step-by-step detailed presentation that leads up to the whole picture.

The majority of the first group would also prefer to snack while learning something new, while the second

Like children, adult learners retain only a portion of what they absorb through their senses.

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group would find food or drink a distraction. Therefore, a person's intake needs are important during decision-making about something difficult.

Bio-rhythms.

Similarly, biological rhythms help determine whether a person is more alert, able to absorb new information, and make decisions during early or late morning, after lunch, early or late afternoon, or during evening hours. Everyone has a "down" time and a more alert time of day when thinking comes easier. Matching the preference with difficult tasks can result in their timely accomplishment as opposed to a mismatch, which may require extra energy for concentration.

School boards generally meet at night regardless of the time-of-day preferences of its members. Knowing that decisions made at night may resurface with a vengeance later, it might be a good idea to delay decisions until a later meeting at a different time of day.

Values.

Modality preferences help determine values. **Visual** learners care about how things **look**; thus meeting in a cluttered environment or presenting a disheveled appearance may prevent others from **hearing** the details discussed.

By contrast, an **auditory** learner may be totally unaware of the **mess** while focusing on how a request **sounds**. Confident language, pacing of delivery, voice volume, and timbre build trust and respect for what is said for an **auditory** learner, who may dismiss a plan, regardless of its merits, when the speaker's voice grates on her sensitivities.

Similarly, a strongly **kinesthetic** learner may find processing information difficult unless given an opportunity to walk, pace, swing a leg, or otherwise **move** while listening and talking.

What can board members do?

Here are some suggestions for accommodating different learning styles among school board members.

1. If a board member is **global**, provide a snack while discussing difficult issues from the community or give the **big-picture point of view** before the details. If she is sluggish during evening board meetings but animated and full of life after lunch or in the late afternoon, save your discussion for the alert, positive time of day. Cognition will be higher and the chances of reaching a solution greater.

2. If the board member is **kinesthet-**

Do You Have a New Idea?

These are how different individuals may react to your new idea, plan of action or project:

- What does it sound like? Is it in harmony with the rest of the organization?
- How does it look? Is its appearance fitting for us?
- How would a model operate? Does it move?
- Where does it fit into the big picture?
- Is this the best time of day to discuss this?
- Let's have lunch and exchange feedback then.

ic or needs mobility, take a walk with her while presenting issues of concern. Don't just tell. Let her experience what you are talking about–kinesthetic learners need first-hand experiences. Visual board members want to see your concerns in writing, drawings, photographs, or in person. Write them a memo, give them information to read, and offer alternative solutions in writing before you tell them about it.

3. Save your lengthy explanations for the **auditory** member who places heavy emphasis on how things sound. For him, articulate clearly. Know what you want to say and say it in a confident manner. Select words that match his preferred modality and provide quiet or soft music if appropriate.

4. Be congruent with your verbal and non-verbal messages so **visual-kinesthetic learners** believe what you intend as well as what the visually perceive. Further, prepare the environment for the board member's auditory and visual comfort rather than your own.

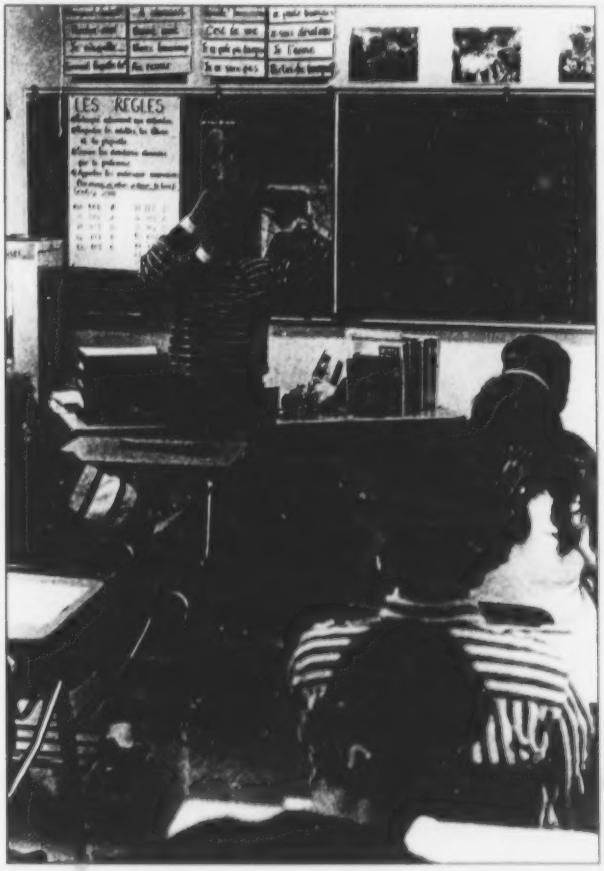
What's the bottom line?

Responding to the physiological preferences of difficult board members can go a long way in resolving conflicts and reaching agreements. Clearly, preferences in the other learning style domains–environmental, sociological, emotional, and psychological–are also important. But based on research, honoring the physiological preferences of difficult people is a great place to begin. In the process, it's a good idea to monitor your own learning style so you can identify where your preferences differ from those of persons you find difficult.

Even though your way of explaining feels comfortable and seems like the "way it's supposed to be," without a doubt, you are probably someone else's difficult person. Maybe if Henry understood his style and how it affects others, he might experiment with alternative modes of interaction. If he accepted this premise, and began acting on it, he would be taking a big step toward changing his interaction patterns. Before long, his difficult board member might turn out to be his best ally.

Barbara K. Given is an associate professor at the Graduate School of Education Learning Disabilities Teacher Preparation Program at George Mason University in Fairfax, VA. She adapted the article from materials presented at an NSBA Trainers' Conference. The story first appeared in the *Wisconsin School News*.

PHOTO GALLERY: Michael Siluk



What people say about you behind your back is your reputation in the community.

Edgar Watson Howe

The Social Divide:

Diversity at New Britton High School Is No Joking Matter

By Phylis West Johnson

New Britton High School is situated on the edge of a relatively upscale neighborhood in North Lankeister, a small coastal town on the West Coast. New Britton has been known for its academics and athletics, but its technology is lagging a few years behind neighboring communities. In fact, without the generosity of a local businessman, there would be no computer lab.

The lab was impressive if determined by number of computers alone, yet it was in dire need of more capacity and software updates.

While some students brought their own laptops to school, many others had no other access to computers outside of school.

The student population was divided disproportionately into two social classes: the "preps" and everybody else. To teachers, the preps were the "nice, smart kids who dressed well," but to the other high school students, they were kids with too much money and a superior attitude.

Over the past year, the preps had claimed "ownership" of the high school's Internet radio site. One particular prep—Bobby Boles—had been elected by his friends to program the station, and the weekly play list was determined from the likes and dislikes of his friends. Internet and Radio Broadcasting was an elective course, designed to familiarize students with mass media principles and computer skills. Under the supervision of Leah Rivera, students would stream news, sports, and music worldwide across the Internet. There was plenty of opportunity for aspiring journalists and computer techies, but when it came to deejaying and deciding what music to play, Bob was in control. Unfortunately, Bob's interests did not reflect the multicultural richness of the people in the district.

Ted Tandrum, now in his fifth year as principal, hired Ms. Rivera only two years ago as the English and Journalism teacher. Now 26, she had worked her way through college, and was eager to change the world, by challenging some of her "less advantaged" students to think globally. It was Ms. Rivera's idea to start an Internet station, and she envisioned it as a way to give her students experience with new technology and to serve their community. North Lankeister was a small, but diverse coastal city of 10,000—30 percent African-American, 15 percent Hispanic, 10 percent Chinese-American, and 45 percent Caucasian. When the station first aired, her idea was to program some shows in Spanish and in Chinese, and to air music that catered to the African-American and White audiences.

Overall, Ms. Rivera's vision was coming to fruition—with the exception of the music streamed across the Internet. The main problems were Bob and Bob's dad—Ralph Boles, the manager of a

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Leah Rivera thought that the daily radio broadcasts should reflect, through music and news, the multicultural richness of the people in the district.

local Internet Server Provider—who was allowing the school free space on his company's broad band server. Ms. Rivera had asked Principal Ted Tandrum to invest in the technology necessary to run the Internet radio station from the school's own server. Yet, Principal Tandrum explained that he had other priority expenses, and that the school was fortunate to have Mr. Boles' generosity and his son's expertise.

Bobby Boles's patience was wearing thin with regards to Ms. Rivera's nagging about the station's need to program more diversity, in particular music that would reflect the different styles and cultures in the community and across the Internet. So Bob had an idea of his own. He got a group of his friends together and decided to play an April Fool's joke on his teacher and "those" students who complained all the time about his choice of music. He thought, "I will see how diverse Ms. Rivera really is!" His friends laughed as they plotted their prank.

April 1st: Waking Up To A Different Tune

This is KBTL, It's a little after 7 A.M. Your Internet Source for Diversity. Hi, This is Your Bad Bobby, streaming your favorite gay and lesbian hits. Here's "Prozzak" with its latest tune.

The pre-recorded programming continued to stream throughout the morning with little notice. But that was until Viola Voight turned on the radio to listen to the 9 A.M. morning news announced by her darling daughter, Cindy, only to hear that her newscast had been preempted by gay/lesbian music. She tried to call Principal Tandrum, but his phone line was busy. She called all her friends, including Paddy Worthington, the superintendent's wife. The women were speechless as they listened on...

I'd like to thank Ms. Rivera and the student body here at New Britton High School for their commitment toward diversity. And now, let's here's a classic from Elton John as we honor gay and lesbian musicians today. Coming up, Mark Islam, Shawn Thomas, and Queen.

Within a few minutes, the phone was ringing in Principal Tandrum's office.

"Mr. Tandrum, what is the idea of airing gay music on a high school station," yelled Viola Voight. "You preempted Cindy for that music!"

"What music? What are you talking about?" exclaimed Principal Tandrum, as he rubbed his balding head.

"You better turn on the radio right away. The deejay just played an Elton

Bobby Boles thought he would play an April Fool's joke on Ms. Rivera and her "pleas of diversity," and dedicated the day's broadcasts to gay and lesbian musicians and their records.

John song."

"So what's wrong with Elton; I grew up listening to him...and so did you!" exclaimed Principal Tandrum.

"No, nothing is wrong with Elton. But they are playing all gay music!" whined Viola. It was always painful to listen to Mrs. Voight over the phone, not only because she was a daily nuisance, but her voice was annoying.

"Viola, I'm sure that you simply misunderstood," explained Principal Tandrum, still puzzled by the phone conversation. "I didn't misunderstand anything, and you better understand this, you better stop that station now and...and fire the teacher responsible for this outrage," said Viola, as she hung up the phone.

As Principal Tandrum booted up his computer, the phone rang again.

"Tandrum, have you been listening to the radio station this morning?" asked Superintendent Willard Worthington, as he held back his anger.

"No, I mean, I am just now connecting to the net," explained nervously Principal Tandrum. "Do that, and call me right back. Wait, on second thought, why don't you call me right after you fire Ms. Rivera!" said Supt. Worthington.

As he buzzed Ms. Rivera to his office, Principal Tandrum typed in www.bltradio.com. Moments later, he listened to a mellow song play on the radio. "What seems to be the problem?," he thought, as the tune played on. Then as the song faded, he heard a young man announce the next one. *"Hi there, radioland. It's J.C. Welcome to KBLT-Radio. It's your favorite Gay and Lesbian Music all day. Ms. Rivera, we love you. Thanks for the idea."* By this time, Ms. Rivera was now standing in Principal Tandrum's office. Always dressed smartly in business attire, with her long black hair tucked in a bun, she looked more like an investment broker rather than a high school teacher. As she listened to the Internet radio dedication, she twisted the edge of her red scarf around her finger.

Principal Tandrum's face turned red, and he blurted, "What were you thinking? No, don't tell me. This is some kind of revenge for not getting you our own server, right?"

Ms. Rivera said, "No, wait, let me try to find out what happened."

"I think I heard enough. I want you to go home right now. I will cover your classes. Go home until I sort out this mess," interrupted Principal Tandrum.

"But wait," pleaded Ms. Rivera.

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"Go now before I call security," said Mr. Tandrum. "And don't talk to the press." Immediately, Principal Tandrum walked into the computer room and pulled the plug on the station. Word spread around school, especially since Ms. Rivera had been sent home. Principal Tandrum then immediately called up Supt. Worthington, who said, "I just got off the phone with Bobby Boles' father, Robert Boles, manager of the Plus Internet Services. He said the kids were mad that you pulled the plug on their radio station, and you had no right to do so."

"What was I supposed to do? I sent Ms. Rivera home until I could sort out this mess," said Principal Tandrum.

"That may not have been a wise decision. Look, I need to call legal. Don't say anything to anyone," continued Supt. Worthington. A few minutes later, there was knock on Mr. Tandrum's office. It was Susan Edge, one of Ms. Rivera's students. She began to tell of Bobby's April Fool's prank to get back at Ms. Rivera.

"Where is Bobby now?," asked Principal Tandrum.

"He's talking to one of the reporters for the *Lankeister Herald*. He got scared when you sent Ms. Rivera home, so now he's telling the press that he was really trying to open up the school to more diverse ways of thinking. Mr. Tandrum, he's lying. He doesn't care about anybody but himself. My mom is a lesbian, and I think what he did was offensive only because he didn't mean it. He makes fun of me and other kids with gay parents—all the time," continued Susan.

"Thank you, Susan, for coming to me. Thank you so much for your honesty. I know it was a difficult decision to come and talk to me about one of your classmates," said Principal Tandrum.

Principal Tandrum began to worry about the ramifications of Bobby's prank. The school board and staff had previously avoided issues related to sexual minorities in the community. The local gay and lesbian community group had recently criticized the school's curriculum in the local media for its lack of inclusiveness and diversity, specifically on issues related to gender. Principal Tandrum could see tomorrow's headline already: School Pulls Plug on Diversity.

"Oh, Bobby, what did you do?" thought Principal Tandrum. "This is not a laughing matter. And I'm sure that Supt. Worthington and the school board will make me the fall guy. Why did I ever allow an Internet Station? What am I going to do?"

The local gay community had criticised the school's curriculum for a lack of inclusiveness. The principal began to worry about the ramifications of Bobby's prank.

That afternoon, Ms. Rivera called the American Civil Liberties Union. When Mr. Tandrum arrived at work the next day, his worst fears would be reality.

Could he look past his fears, and devise a solution that would be positive for his school, and the larger community? It was going to be a long night.

Case Study Response:

Building Consensus: Closing The Digital Gap On Diversity

by Kelly McKerrow

Immature judgment by students in high school is exactly what teachers and administrators should expect. After all, that is why we call them juveniles and the schools they attend "institutions of learning." Educators need to teach lessons that often do not come from a text, and Bobby Boles' prank is a case in point. What makes this case problematic for Principal Tandrum is the irony attached to the overt actions of privileged and childish adolescents.

Clearly, the school community needed to address diversity but not in the same way that Ms. Rivera had sought to do it. Her focus on challenging the "less advantaged" students to think globally blinded her to the real need among the preps to appreciate and celebrate diversity.

In turn, Principal Tandrum became an unwitting pawn in a group of students' subtle, homophobic, and baleful attacks on fellow students generally and on Ms. Rivera specifically. The homophobia demonstrated by the broadcast is only a symptom of a deeper issue. However, Tandrum must deal with two problems now.

First, while Supt. Worthington instructed Tandrum to say nothing, circumstances made it impossible to ignore the press, especially since Bobby Boles had already spoken to a reporter in order to cover up the original deceit.

Tandrum has to get a handle on how the issue is being played out in the press. To do this he needs to scan the reportage for the next few hours. He should watch the local news. He should get a copy of the daily newspaper and listen to the local radio stations, taping them if feasible. To respond before finding out exactly what is in the reports is ill-advised. Tandrum should do his homework, wait to determine the angle that the media reporters are following, and respond with a plan, preferably one in writing. With any luck there will be minimal coverage, so that the potential for short-term damage is mitigated.

Second, the principal overreacted to Ms. Rivera.

While he may have thought that he was acting on the authority of the superintendent, that is never an excuse for violating someone's right to due process.

She offered to try and find out what happened but was not given the opportunity. Now that he has learned the circumstances of Ms. Rivera's situation, he owes her an apology. It would be best if he got on the phone immediately to acknowledge his error, to ask her return to his office in the morning, and give her a simple, honest, written apology.

The more important issue here involves Bobby Boles, his father Robert,

and Viola Voight. Intentional disrespect of a teacher, suppression of diversity, and ignoring potentially harassing behavior can and will have serious ramifications for all of the students and educators in the district. Not only does Bobby's prank have to be dealt with by the administration, but his lying does also.

The issue is further complicated by the fact that both Viola Voight and Robert Boles assume that their particular points of view should prevail and that suppression, by default, of alternative perspectives is reasonable. There are facts, in this case, to suggest not only is this perspective unreasonable, but that the administration has an affirmative obligation to act and to eliminate it.

The question that Principal Tandrum has to ask himself is whether or not there is a way to salvage the situation. He needs to find the means so that civic lessons in diversity are learned, expression of ideas is actively promoted rather than stifled, and harassment of sexual minorities is stopped.

Tandrum should play to the school's strengths. He has a radio station, a teacher committed to diversity, a relatively upscale support system and an incident that ironically brought the issue to the forefront.

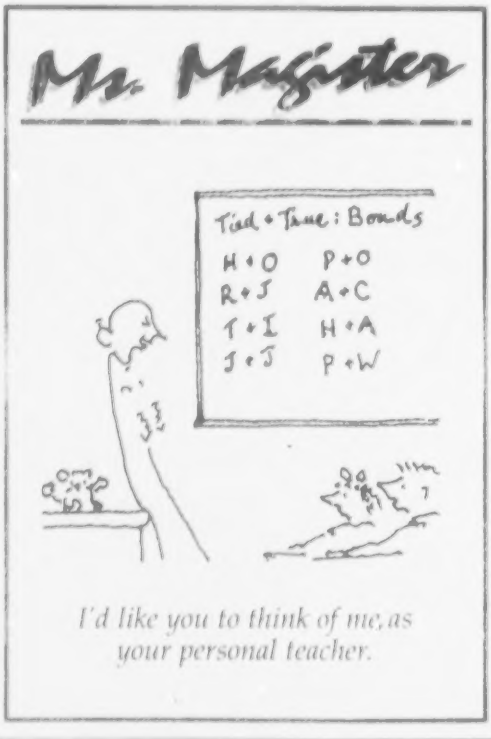
Tandrum could then ask Ms. Rivera to head up an ad hoc task force on Gay-Straight Alliances. He should charge this committee with developing harassment and discrimination policies. In addition, the committee could advise the board on the issues associated with discrimination.

Service on the task force could be an alternative for Bobby in lieu of in-school suspension or other punishment. Susan Edge, Viola Voight, and those who expressed concern, positively or negatively, about the curriculum should be invited to attend.

The point is that Principal Tandrum will get best results if the fundamental civic lessons in diversity emerge from the students, teachers, and community.

Case Study Editor is Phylis West Johnson. She is associate professor at Southern Illinois University, Dept. of Radio-TV, Mailcode 6609, Carbondale, IL 62901.

Kelly McKerrow is associate professor of education administration at Southern Illinois University.



Book Reviews

by Albert E. Holliday, guest book editor for this issue.

Ratings: Four stars (excellent) to one star (fair)

In reviewing books, I give special attention to how writers treat school public relations topics, since that is the prime subject area of this journal. I also look for what they say about schooling in economically depressed areas, which have more single parent families than usual, resulting in added difficulty in creating optimal school-community relations.

Books for review should be sent to Art Steller at his **new** address: High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, 600 N. River St., Ypsilanti, MI 48198.

***

What Every Principal Would Like to Say...and What to Say Next Time

By Noah benShea

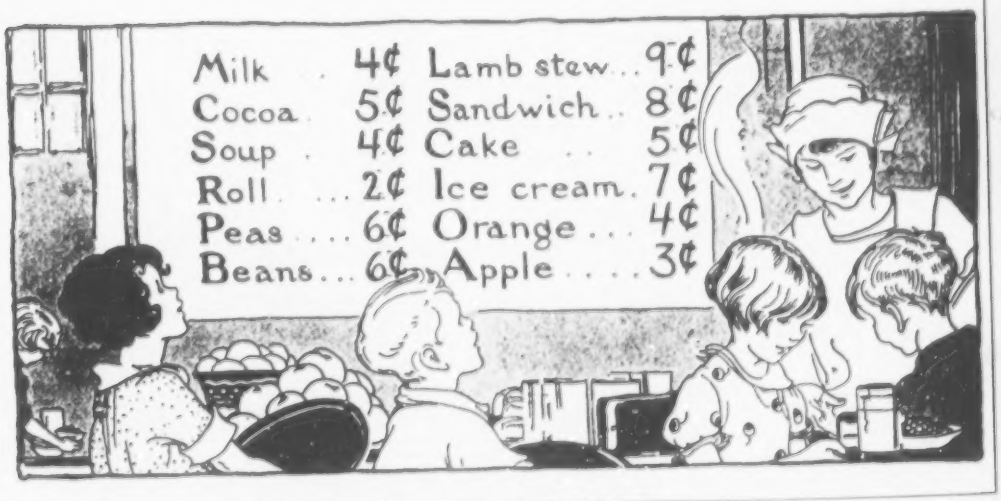
Corwin Press; 2000. $24.95

The title is misleading–this is a fine reference text for anyone who writes or speaks. BenShea has assembled 146 pages of quotes and statements, with attribution, in 23 categories ranging from alternative schools to communication to fund raising to research to women in education.

These divisions make the book quite useful–one can find 20 to 30 quotes on each of those 23 categories and build them into a text or speech for illustration or subtle humor.

Examples:

Assessment—To choose, it is first necessary to know...Herman Finer



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The knowledge of the world is only to be acquired in the world, and not in a closet...Lord Chesterfield

None can make you feel inferior without your consent...Eleanor Roosevelt

Counseling—Just as the twig is bent, the tree's inclined...Alexander Pope

I have never let my schooling interfere with my education...Mark Twain

In giving advice I advise you, be short...Horace

Rating: This is a three-star reference for thinkers and doers anywhere but especially in education.

**(*)

Designing Surveys That Work. A step-by-step guide.

By Susan J. Thomas

Corwin Press; 1999

The author is a performance consultant with IBM and has been a university faculty member and workshop leader.

Her text is useful for those educators or boards who wish to learn people's opinions or needs before embarking on a new program or building or project of any kind. She takes the reader through planning and writing a survey, testing it, obtaining names of respondents, collecting data, and writing the survey results/report.

Dr. Thomas has prepared an excellent text as far as it goes. It does lack two important factors.

One is a listing of mistakes-to-avoid, or what not to do. Her ten years of experience should have allowed her to see the kinds of errors first time survey-makers make. Readers would appreciate examples of poorly written questions and surveys with poor organization of content. Seeing others' errors helps avoid my error.

Two, a reader would have gained insight from seeing copies of actual survey forms, answer sheets and reports of results. She does show sample forms and outlines of what she recommends and these are fine. But seeing an excellent actual survey form someone else sent out would have been illuminating.

Cartoons from Alberta, Canada:

We feature in this issue several of Jim Simpson's cartoons. These are featured regularly in the quarterly magazine published by the Alberta Teachers' Association (11010 142 Street, Edmonton, Alberta Canada. T5N2R1).

Jim's character is Ms. Magister, a teacher who has cryptic comments about education generally and the people she encounters.

A little speed bump on the road to glory.

Rating: Two stars (with an extra star in reserve if she does a second edition with added attention to real-life examples). Educators tend to rely too much on their own opinions, and this text can be a guide to seek outside opinions and reactions.

**

The Good Teacher's Almanac

By Tom Smock

Van Arsdale House Publishing, 126 Main St., Stanhope, NJ 07874; 2001. $17.95. vahpub@aol.com.

Physics teacher Smock has commentary on the mission of teachers and wants to share his techniques and ideas with other teachers. He covers how to find a mentor, building rapport with students, effective lesson planning, keeping perspective during difficult periods, and when to use non-traditional methods.

This text would probably be best appreciated by a college of education student in the final year of academic preparation. It could also be helpful to a retired teacher who has been asked to return to teaching on a part-time basis, and for a community member who has been asked to teach a course or two at an academy or special school or at a community college. It could also be a reference for high school students who express an interest in becoming a teacher.

Rating: Two stars for would-be teachers. Practicing teachers would probably not be inclined to study the book.

***

If I Only Knew–Success Strategies for Navigating the Principalship

By Harvey B. Alvy and Pam Robbins

Corwin Press; 1998. $19.95

The authors devote one chapter to "Human relations and authentic communication." That is a fine sign of useful content to this reviewer.

The authors have sought to orient a prospective principal, or a current one seeking renewal, to the tasks and techniques that must be mastered to be successful. Ample quotes from peers and a fair number of mini-case incidents and examples help convey a sense of reality and practical application of the counsel

provided by the authors.

Selected advice for the new principal:

> Communicate and create a partnership with veteran staff members as early as possible. A key strategy is to meet with veterans at their convenience before the school year begins...Be mindful of their accomplishments even if the school needs to move in a direction that conflicts with their performance. Veterans can be powerful in a school; [they] are part of the historical culture and can be formidable opponents.

The text would be especially useful in a graduate course for prospective administrators, for current administrative interns, and for assistant principals hoping to move up soon.

Rating: Three stars.

★★★★

Yo! Joey! Unique Memoir of A Unique Superintendent

By Joseph P. Batory

Leadership Press, P.O. Box 56249, Philadelphia, PA 19130; 1999. $11.95

Joe Batory is a now-retired superintendent who hardly ever passed a chance to write or speak out about what is needed to improve schools. He was a teacher, principal and a school public relations director before becoming superintendent in a Philadelphia suburban district in 1984. His journey through the halls of education is described in colorful language. He gives details of his encounters with the press, the state education department, those who would ban books and even the local arch bishop, as he sought justice for his schools and students. He also pays tribute to pals Sal, Rocco and Guido from his childhood years in South Philadelphia. Batory's book is a fine text for an administrator's lending library.

Rating: Four stars (if just to encourage others to write and speak out often and with vigor).

★★★★ Content ★ Style

Developing Community-Empowered Schools

By Mary Ann Burke and Lawrence O. Picus

Corwin Press; 2001. $24.95

This is intended to be a workbook for educators and people in a commu-

Mr. Magister
TOP TITLES from BARNETT HOUSE
1 Sex in the School Act
2 Dial Your Way to Higher Pay
3 Tenure Tips for Tyros
4 The Secret of
5 I Spied for the Board
6 Internal Dalliance
7 Suspended by Passion
8 From the Top
9 RTD Cover

A bold attempt to increase circulation.

nity who wish to start a charter or community-based school.

I find the language to be overly academic and with more than a fair supply of jargon. The authors do not clearly indicate the audience they seek for this text, nor do they show how the text is to be used.

While the book is comprehensive on the elements of a community-resident empowered school, the authors do not tell the reader: 1., how to determine the empowerment factors of the local school; 2., how to learn of its strengths and weaknesses; 3., how to put together a list of priorities, a team of people to work on them, and a schedule or planning calendar of activities.

I would like to see a second edition of the book, in hopes that the user feedback of the first edition would result in a more reader-friendly "how-to" text.

Rating: Four stars for content/substance, one star for style.

***

Passing the Standard!–An eight-step action for schools and communities.

By Denis P. Doyle and Susan Pimentel

Corwin Press; 1999(Second Edition).

This is supposed to be a reading text (no worksheets) to help people reform their schools. The authors center the content around "success" stories of reform in five diverse school districts in the United States. The text appears to be almost theoretical in approach. It has few examples in depth, no charts or worksheets, no lists of principles and success steps but lots of rhetoric, in the not-helpful sense.

The reader who appreciates detail may find it in an accompanying CD-ROM that provides "voluminous material including explanatory narrative, extensive anecdotes, samples and examples, a variety of existing statements of standards on local and state levels."

The authors refer to an online version at www.goalline.org, which is designed to permit readers to stay up-to-date with other users of the book/CD-ROM.

For people who believe their schools are in great need of reform, these materials may be of value, provided that the people work in a group with a leader who is able to give direction and assign tasks in specific areas.

Rating: Three stars, text and disc and online links for people in a group effort.

The address of Corwin Press is 2455 Teller Rd., Thousand Oaks, CA 91320. Email info@sagepub.com

PHOTO GALLERY: Geri Kody.....

I like everything about writing except the paperwork.

Peter de Vries

Photo Credits

Addresses for photographers whose work we are using in *Journal* issue

Michael Siluk lives and works from Blain, Minnesota, (2872 89th Lane N.E., 55449). His phone number is 612-636-5843, and he is available for assignments.

Geri Kody can be contacted at Clark County Schools, 4212 Eucalyptus Ave., Las Vegas, NV 89121; 702-799-5442.

David Clohessy is director of community services at Riverview Gardens Schools, St. Louis, Missouri.

They can supply a variety of photos for review and publication on a one-time basis for fees to be arranged depending on the nature of the use.

Mission Statement
The mission of *School Public Relations Journal* is to enhance student achievement and staff accomplishment. This is done by stimulating those people who operate schools to communicate with, and build relationships among, all people in the greater school district community.

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Guidelines for Submission

Relations—The School Public Relations Journal

A refereed journal--scholarly articles by academic/higher education authorities are refereed by an international editorial review board. The *Journal* also accepts articles by practitioners and administrators in basic (K-12) education and journalists at large.

Scope

Articles are sought on topics such as internal communication and climate, employee motivation, parent involvement, partnerships, working with the news media, community participation, audits, surveying and polls, community service programs for students, communication training, advisory committees, volunteers, writing and speaking, publications, alumni associations, foundations, mentoring, photography, and related topics.

The overall goal of the *Journal* is to support efforts to enhance/foster student achievement and staff productivity, and to provide information to build public knowledge of the value and potential benefits of a sound basic education of our youth. We advocate the concept that the school public relations function must be based on fact and reality as compared to ideals and goals of educators and the community at large.

Style

Scholarly articles can be prepared following style guidelines of the publication manual of the American Psychological Association, **with these exceptions:**

1. **Do not** place last names of authors being cited and the year *within* the text. Number citations sequentially in the text; provide usual citations in **references following the article.**

2. Before the start of the article, include a summary of the scope and major findings of the article in one paragraph.

We encourage you to include photographs, drawings, and tables as appropriate.

Submissions

- Submit four copies of a manuscript with a letter from the author(s).
- Articles should be 1,000 to 3,500 words in length.
- If produced on a computer, send an e-mail to AlbertEHolliday@aol.com for instructions.
- Include an abstract of the article and a two-three sentence credit for each author on a separate sheet.
- Advise if the article has been published or is being considered elsewhere.
- Queries for articles on specific topics are welcomed.
- SASE. Include a #10 self-addressed, stamped envelope for acknowledgement of receipt of your article. Include a 9" x 12" similar envelope for reply to submissions or queries.
- Response to an article or a query is usually conveyed to an author within 60 days.

Address manuscripts and correspondence to Albert E. Holliday, Editor and Publisher, *School Public Relations Journal*, 1830 Walnut St., Camp Hill, PA 17011. 717-761-6620. E-mail: AlbertEHolliday@aol.com.

Previous *Journals* are available in microfilm from University Microfilm Int., 300 Zeeb Rd., Ann Arbor, MI 48106.

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University of Illinois
51 Gerty Dr.
Champaign, IL 61820-7469

Reasons Why the English Language Is So Hard to Learn

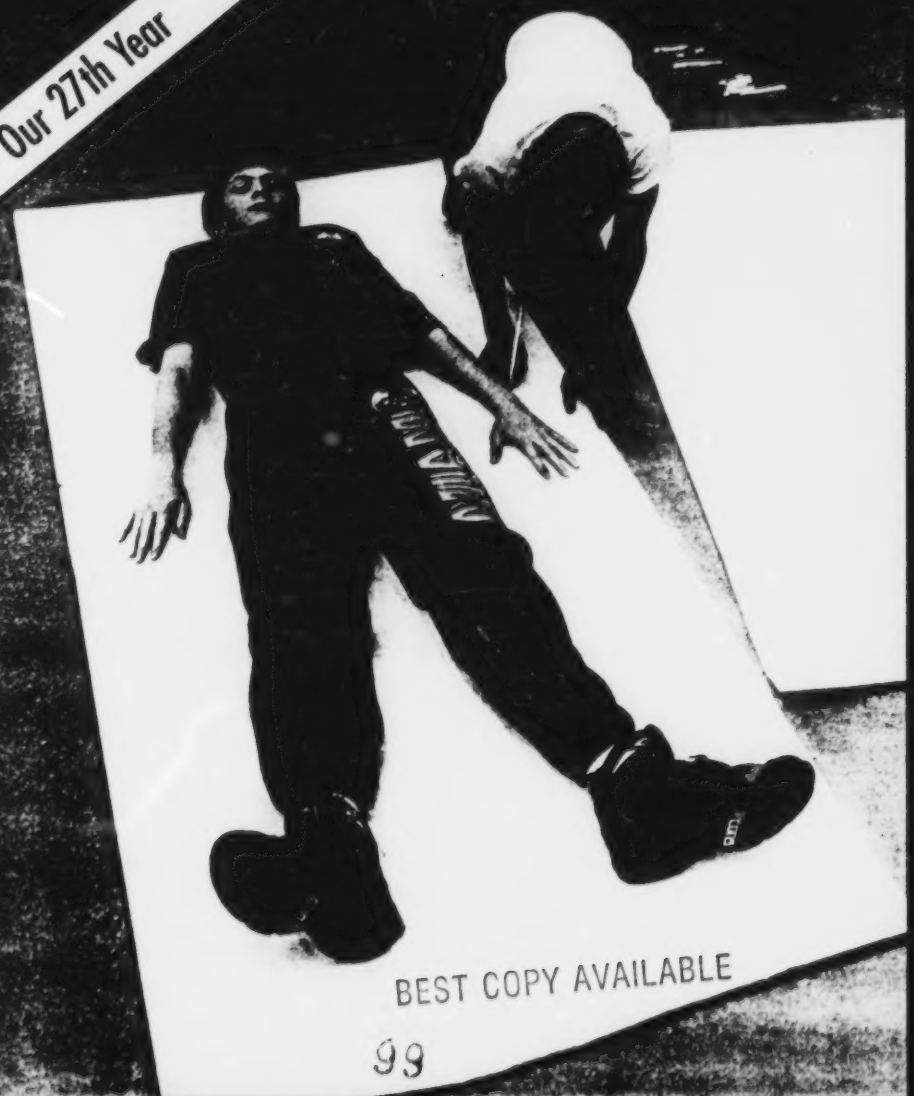
The bandage was wound around the wound.
The farm was used to produce produce.
The dump was so full that it had to refuse more refuse.
We must polish the Polish furniture.
He could lead if he would get the lead out.
The soldier decided to desert his dessert in the desert.
Since there is no time like the present, he thought it was time to present the present.
A bass was painted on the head of the bass drum.
When shot at, the dove dove into the bushes.
I did not object to the object.
The insurance was invalid for the invalid.
There was a row among the oarsmen about how to row.
They were too close to the door to close it.
The buck does funny things when the does are present.
A seamstress and a sewer fell down into a sewer line.
To help with planting, the farmer taught his sow to sow.
The wind was too strong to wind the sail.
After a number of injections my jaw got number.
Upon seeing the tear in the painting I shed a tear.
I had to subject the subject to a series of tests.
How can I intimate this to my most intimate friend?

—Anon.

SCHOOL PUBLIC RELATIONS

Journal

Our 27th Year



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99

Formerly the Journal of Educational Relations

Promoting student achievement through positive school-home-community relationships Vol. 22 No. 3 • 2001

Notes from the Editor

As You Are Taught, So Will You Act

That has been the theory at the undergraduate and graduate levels at schools of education in all areas we know of, except for one—School Community Relations.

As far as we can learn, no university preparing school administrators requires more than cursory or survey overviews of this field. Of the 600 or so schools of education, about 300 offer one class as an elective. Rowan University, formerly Glassboro University, of New Jersey may be the only institution offering a Master of Arts specialization in School Public Relations.

Long time readers of the *Journal* know of our concern in this area. It dates at least to 1967, when this editor was with Project Public Information.

At a PPI conference that year, Florida's state schools CEO Floyd Christian said, "To fulfill our responsibility to the public, we must [find ways to] provide communication training for prospective educational administrators, and employ knowledgeable PR specialists to help us accurately reflect our problems activities and goals."

Unfortunately, it doesn't appear that we have found enough ways, at least as yet.

Require a Course for Education Majors?

In this edition, Ted Kowalski proposes that people hoping to be school CEOs or principals be **required to study communication**. The University of Dayton professor urges state licensing and professional boards to modify the curricula that universities must follow for administrator preparation leading to certification.

The CEO Job *Is* Changing Rapidly

Both Dr. Kowalski and Paul Houston (AASA Ex. Director) believe that the job requirements of today, even more so than recent years, demand that superintendents be well grounded in school-community relations.

Writing in the Feb. 2001 *KAPPAN*, Dr. Houston writes that they must "be great facilitators and learn how to take the pulse of the public and sell their ideas. Being fine managers is no longer sufficient," he believes. "They must be experts in communication and community building, among other skills, to be successful these days."

A problem exists, however, he says. "Our current [higher education] system is inadequate for this new model...most current coursework...prepares CEOs for command-and-control managing. [College professors] do not teach the collaborative skills needed in today's...complex environment."

Your editor agrees with Drs. Christian, Kowalski and Houston. We urge your consideration of their points of view.

Al Holliday

Albert E. Holliday
Editor-Publisher

Back Issues Available, Free for Resource Uses

We are clearing out all back issues of the *Journal* and they are available free, but you pay postage of $7.

As articles have usually not dealt with timely issues, these Journals are quite useful as resource references by University students in School PR classes.

To receive a box of *Journals* (20 or more different editions), send a check for $7 to the editor.

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3rd Quarter, 2001

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Cover photo by Michael Siluk

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"Restructuring" efforts magnify the need for comprehensive education in PR

Administrators Need to Study Communication

by Theodore Kowalski

Public school reform has taken three distinct turns over the past two decades. In the early 1980s, most policymakers blamed a lack of educational productivity on lazy students. Influenced by this argument, virtually every state legislature enacted laws lengthening the school year, lengthening the school day, and increasing high school graduation requirements. Within a relatively short period of time, however, the would-be reformers concluded that intensification of student experiences was insufficient to produce significant improvements. While not abandoning their original conviction, they shifted their attention to a second target—educators. The result was a flurry of proposals to revise or eliminate teacher education curricula and licensing standards. But these actions also proved to be incomplete, and by the early 1990s, the reformers identified a third target—the organizational configuration of schools.[1]

Now that reform is focusing largely on school restructuring, cultural change has become a popular topic in school administration. This article explores the meaning of school restructuring and culture change. A nexus between institutional culture and communication is proposed, and an argument is made that cultural change will not occur unless those leading the process possess necessary communication knowledge and skills.

Restructuring and School Culture

Prior to the 1990s, either rational or political strategies were used to pursue school change. The former assumes school change will occur as a result of exposing educators to new programs or new teaching methods; workshops and conferences exemplify this approach. The latter assumes teachers and administrators are either incapable of initiating change or unwilling to do so. Essentially power elites (e.g., governors

and legislatures) try to coerce educators to change. Both strategies have produced only marginal gains.

Consider the following conditions that attenuate their effectiveness:

•Exposure to new teaching methods or programs rarely requires educators to interface new ideas with fundamental values and beliefs. Consequently, proposed changes are usually rejected when they conflict with the traditional role expectations of educators.[28, 29]

•When initially coerced, administrators and teachers almost always revert to past practices once the pressures to change lessen.[9] This pattern of reversion largely explains why the basic structure of public schools has remained intact after multiple reform movements.

Those proposing focused change often do not understand how educators are able to exercise considerable power to resist change, especially when they act in unison.[29]

Perhaps the weaknesses of both rational and political strategies have not been more apparent because they are almost always used to alter selected portions of the educational system rather than the entire system.

•Current calls for school restructuring are predicated on the judgments that schools are complex social institutions and that school restructuring requires a social systems perspective.[9, 25, 30] That is, if schools and districts are to be sufficiently improved, they must be treated as complex entities composed of interrelated and interacting parts. This perspective reveals the fallacy of blaming education's deficiency on a single factor. More important, it discloses the futility of trying to reform education by merely manipulating one or two of the system's elements. "Systemic thinking requires us to accept that the way social systems are put together has independent effects on the way people behave, what they learn, and how they learn what they learn."[11, 32] Schools are shaped by both internal and external political transactions; thus, values and beliefs about education are central to determining the nature of schools. Largely for this reason, proposals for structural change that are not supported by changes in values and beliefs get overwhelmed by the prevailing culture.[32]

Organizational structure refers to the formal ordering of roles in terms of authority, job descriptions, and work assignments; also included are the arrangements of networks that affect formal and informal interactions.[19] Restructuring thus implies reshaping these core organizational elements. Compared to non-systemic reform initiatives, the goal of redesigning schools is more manifold and challenging for at least four reasons:

Restructuring can mean different things to different people. It often involves open discussions of what seem to be intractable and deeply troubling problems such as governance, the distribution of power, and organizational design.[5] The potential for conflict is substantial.

Both state deregulation and district decentralization are promoted as mechanisms for restructuring. Unlike mandates, they require that core policy decisions be made at the district and school levels.[20] This condition revises ideal administrative roles and necessitates additional leadership competencies.

A century of failed reforms incrementally reinforced a shared belief among educators that substantial

Many administrators continue to believe that the sole purposes of communication are to "tell and control."

change is neither necessary nor politically advantageous.[29] Essentially, educators have been socialized to accept things as they are.[37] Most see no reason to reshape schools, nor do most envision a reward for doing so.

There are conflicting opinions as to whether all public schools share a common culture, a condition that is quite important to considering how change should be pursued. After studying American public education for more than 20 years, Seymour Sarason argued that core elements of institutional culture—components that define roles, responsibilities, and the distribution of power—explained the behavioral uniformities he observed when visiting public schools across the 50 states.[29] Studies conducted on effective schools, however, suggest something different. Research by Purkey and Smith found that values, norms, and assumptions not readily observed in other schools guided educators in highly productive institutions.[27] Writing about cultural variability, E. Mark Hanson concluded, 'Various idiosyncratic elements help shape a school's culture, such as early history, community expectations, leadership, traditions involving standards of excellence, and rates of teacher turnover'.[11] In all probability, Sarason's observation of uniformity was based on tacit values and beliefs; that is, classroom environments and teacher behavior appeared to be very uniform. However, explorations into the deepest levels of culture often expose differences among schools with respect to underlying values and beliefs. Thus some aspects of culture, generally those that are readily observed, are common to all schools while others, generally those most difficult to discern, often are not.

Culture not only is a central element of restructuring, it also determines how individuals and groups promote and accept change.[22] In recent years, various aspects of the change process that relate to school culture have been discussed in the literature. Examples include the effects of transformational leadership,[21] the need for collaboration,[21] barriers to true professionalism,[17, 35] and consequences of not conceptualizing schools as communities.[33] Collectively, this knowledge base suggests that restructuring must occur from the center of a school and be culturally based.

Culture and Communication

Does culture create communication or does communication build culture? A macroanalysis of communication research produced two cogent findings: (a) most studies used mod-

ernistic approaches rather than naturalistic or critical inquiry; (b) most researchers categorized culture as a causal variable and communication as an intervening variable.[4] More recently, however, the existence of a cause and effect relationship has been questioned. Charles Conrad wrote:

> Cultures are communicative creations. They emerge and are sustained by the communicative acts of all employees, not just the conscious persuasive strategies of upper management. Cultures do not exist separately from people communicating with one another.[7]

Today, communication scholars are more prone to describe the relationship between the culture and communication as reciprocal. Stephen Axley characterized the bond thusly, 'Communication gives rise to culture, which gives rise to communication, which perpetuates culture'.[2] In this vein, communication is a process through which organizational members express their collective inclination to coordinate beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes—in schools, communication gives meaning to work and forges perceptions of reality. As such, culture affects communication, but communication also is central to building, maintaining, and changing culture.

Given the intricate nature of cultural change, many scholars[10] conclude that administrators should have an understanding of how culture is formed, how it influences thinking and behavior, and how it can be transformed. Indeed, students preparing to be principals and superintendents commonly study organizational theories, including those relating to culture. But far less recognized is the need for them to study communication. For instance, it is important to know how one-way channels of communication became the norm in public schools during the early part of the 20th century. This knowledge creates an understanding of why many administrators continue to believe that the sole purposes of communication are to 'tell' and to 'control.' It is equally important for contemporary practitioners to understand why they should take into account the critical importance of feedback and focus on reciprocal information exchanges when pursuing school restructuring.[12]

Cultural change begins with an accurate depiction of the past and present. To do this, Edgar Schein suggested that leaders engage others in open discussions that center on five themes:

1. **Relationship with the environment** (Who is served by the school? What is the school's relationship with the community?)
2. **Reality, truth, and the basics for decisions** (How are validity and truth established? What assumptions define reality?)
3. **Nature of human beings** (Are students inclined to be productive? Are parents inclined to be cooperative?)
4. **Nature of human activity** (How are problems solved? How are decisions made?)
5. **Nature of human relationships** (How are power and authority distributed? What relationships are acceptable and unacceptable?)

A true cognizance of how we communicate with each other is predicated on our awareness of:

> ...(1) the process of sending and receiving messages through specific channels; (2) the formal and informal impediments and facilitators of the

process; and (3) the multivariate social, political, cultural, and economic environments that surround and permeate every aspect of the communication process.[11]

Additional expectations include:

•facilitating the process of bringing people together to discuss their values and beliefs so that they can collectively establish goals for renewal[18]

•galvanizing support among policymakers and other citizens and persuading them to endorse and enthusiastically support the school's initiatives[11]

•facilitating the work of other educators to reach diverse groups of students and their parents.[16]

The need for open communication is also evident in more specific responsibilities, such as selecting staff whose values are congruous with the school's vision, reinforcing dominant values, and sharing power and responsibility.[22] Schein observed 'The learning culture must be built on the assumption that communication and information are central to organizational well-being and must therefore create a multichannel communication system that allows everyone to connect to everyone else'.[11] Leaders who want open, learning organizations create conditions permitting them to 'listen fully and accurately to all voices, both negative and positive.'[14]

Communication and Administrator Preparation

Experiences with previous reform efforts and the professional knowledge base suggest that the following conclusions are valid:

•Change is more likely if it is initiated and carried out by those who are most affected.

•Restructuring can not occur unless organizational culture is revamped.

•Culture and communication maintain a reciprocal relationship; hence, any effort to change culture involves communication.

•Culture change requires dynamic leadership; those who lead the process must possess knowledge and skills in communication not previously deemed necessary for school administrators.

•Although school restructuring has become a widely accepted goal as evidenced by growing state deregulation and district decentralization, there is little evidence that the study of communication is receiving adequate attention in professional preparation programs.

•In rational and political paradigms, decisions about change objectives are typically determined by a select number of individuals. In cultural change models, they are shaped by the ideas, feelings, and opinions of those who are the primary targets of change—students and teachers.[24]

•Rather than directing others, administrators listen, synthesize, and share vital information. The intent is to build common understandings, beliefs, and values that determine what is done and how it is done.[26] This intricate and difficult process requires leadership from a person who can earn trust and build collegial relationships.

When an administrator appropriately recognizes that organization does not precede communication and becomes subsequently supported by it, he or she is more inclined to view organization as an effect of communication.[18] Accordingly, the practitioner needs to understand how and why the existing culture was established and sustained. He or she also needs to com-

"Communication and information are central to organizational well-being...schools need a multichannel system that allows everyone to connect with everyone else."

prehend how personal actions symbolically reinforce or contradict existing culture.[8] Language in a school or district is the primary vehicle through which audiences develop a sense of order—it reveals how various publics collectively define and participate in organizational reality.[9]

Why Educators Must Study Communication

In summary, there are two primary reasons why school administrators (and arguably all educators) need to study communication science.

One is to ensure that they can engage in rebuilding their own cultures to accommodate restructuring; the other is to ensure that they can make necessary adaptations to sustain those cultures.

Although there are many areas of communication that could be studied, the following are considered the most essential for present-day administrators:

•**Developing comprehensive listening skills.** Communication studies in organizations report that individuals are usually cognizant of listening-related behaviors such as attentiveness, nonverbal behavior, attitudes, memory, and overt responses;[11] however, less noted is the fact that a person who routinely exhibits good listening skills is perceived as respectful, interested, and concerned.[4]

•**Establishing credibility.** Leaders earn credibility when they do what they say they will do. People listen to an administrator's words and look at his or her deeds. A judgment of credible is handed down when the two are consonant.[13]

•**Understanding Nonverbal communication.** Nonverbal communication is often symbolic and occurs at the unconscious level. It is a way of expressing emotions, e.g., excitement, disappointment; an avenue for conveying interpersonal attitudes, e.g., sincerity, openness; an avenue for presenting one's personality to others, e.g., aggressive, introverted; and an extension of verbal communication, e.g., reinforcing words, substituting gestures for words.[1]

•**Communicating in context.** Contextual variables may interfere with communication and contribute to misinterpretations, even to the extent that a message is completely distorted.[14] Thus, administrators should understand how factors such as prejudice, ethnic diversity, gender differences, and organizational structure can influence communication.

•**Resolving conflict through communication.** Conflict is inevitable in all types of organizations. While communication may occur without conflict, 'conflict cannot occur without

some type of communication'.[12] In many school districts, administrators spend a significant portion of their time dealing with tensions that form and grow as a result of social interactions. Consequently, conflict and communication in school systems are inextricably linked, because communication behaviors both contribute to conflict and become a vehicle for resolving it (e.g., building cooperation). Effective conflict management is unlikely if an administrator does not comprehend the dynamics of conflict and possess the ability to use cooperative communication strategies.[16]

•Relating culture and communication to organizational behavior. Behavior in schools is frequently unpredictable and bewildering. Since communication is observable, it provides a window for understanding the deeper levels of institutional culture and for determining how basic assumptions and beliefs shape behavior. To gain these insights, administrators need to integrate communication theory into the study of organizational theory.[17]

Concluding Thoughts

An argument for requiring prospective administrators to study communication could be made even in the absence of the current need for school restructuring. A recent study, for example, found that 50 percent of principals had **underestimated** the extent to which communication would be pervasive in their work.

This same study showed that the academic preparation of principals in communication varied considerably across courses in communication, content in educational administration courses, and content of staff development programs.[18] And these conditions persist despite repeated efforts to make communication a core skill for school administrators.

Perhaps past tolerance of this disjunction between ideal and real practice is explained by expectations that administrators function as managers—an expectation that merely essentially requires them to communicate by dictating memoranda and giving verbal commands.

Clearly, the pursuit of school restructuring has not **created a need** for administrators to study communication science; rather it has **magnified** the need significantly.

Action to remedy this deficiency is should be addressed on three fronts.

First, state licensing officials or professional standards boards need to emphasize the value of communication and interpersonal skills. These agencies typically have the power to modify curricula for professional preparation.

Second, officials of professional organizations, state departments of education, universities, and school districts need to provide communication learning opportunities for those already in practice.

Finally, school officials need to value communication and human relations as essential skills. This can be expressed directly in employment decisions and symbolically in efforts to assist and reward employee growth.

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Why Do They Always Look for the Negative?

Four examples of how to work with the news media.

By Brad Hughes

Audience: Superintendents might wish to share this article with board members and building administrators.

Two questions are frequently posed by school leaders in discussion about relations with their local news media: "Why does the press always focus on the negative?" and "Why is (report A) 'news,' but (report B) isn't 'news?'" In turn, two questions are frequently posed by reporters in discussions about relations with their local school leaders: "Why can't they just shoot straight with me?" and "Why are they always on the defensive?"

Members of each group point fingers and raise issues of ethics, hidden agendas, protecting reputations, etc. It's too easy to just say that bad publicity comes with the territory of public institutions. In fact, the answers are often in the motivation of the person asking the question.

Consider these four charge-countercharge situations recently involving Kentucky schools and local news media. For each, note the particulars of a news story, the reason the reporter(s) covered this topic the way they did, the outcomes of the story, and my comments.

Example 1.

Sneaking In To Make The School Look Bad Vs. Raising Public Awareness Of A Potential Problem

•***The news story:*** A young-looking employee of a TV station enters several public schools with a hidden camera. In most cases, the unidentified adult is not challenged by school personnel, and the video captures the "intruder" roaming the halls with students.

•**The motivation:** In this case, ratings. Any claim to "fair" journalism was devastated by multiple promotions by TV executives of a special series in an important ratings "sweeps" month, complete with teases in preceding newscasts that parents might be "surprised" at what "our investigation" found.

•**The outcome:** The superintendent—feeling that violations of school policy

and students' legal right to privacy were blown off—filed a formal complaint with the Federal Communications commission. Further, the superintendent wrote the station that if such disregard for district rules continued, station employees would be barred from all school facilities.

•*Comment:* District personnel claim the bold response from the school system CEO produced a renewed desire by TV news personnel to work with the district staff.

However, you should think long and hard about barring one local media outlet from public school spaces left open to other visitors, parents and other reporters. Additionally, realize that responsibility for enforcing the rules of student right to privacy falls on the school, not the news media.

[Editor's Note: Any matter dealing with school security needs to be dealt with seriously by school officials, and finger pointing is not a solution.]

Example 2.
Giving Parents a Way to Air Concerns Vs. Using a Media Forum to Deride the School System.

•***The news story:*** A newspaper columnist invited parents to write to her with their comments about the local school system, and she promised to print their comments.

• **The motivation:** One quote from her column says it all: "Obviously, there's a disconnect between the school administrators and its public." The column is a frequent forum for criticism—sometimes justifiable, sometimes just opinion—of the school system.

•**The outcome:** Plenty of parents had plenty to say, but few who raised problems were able to offer solutions.

•*Comment:* In fact, the columnist provided a definitive example of the tough job facing school board members and superintendents. Here are some of the parent comments:

"Magnet schools are working." AND "I do not feel the magnet schools are working."

"I am thrilled with the education (my two children) are receiving." AND "We are not happy with (our daughter's) education this year."

"Never has there been a time that I have not felt welcome or not appreciated for being there for whatever reason." AND "I concluded last spring that this system is rotten to the core, and that no amount of effort on my part would ever be effective."

"I don't have a problem with the start time." AND "I am so tired of wondering every year what the new start times will be."

Example 3.
The Reporter is Out to Get Me Vs. We Published the Truth

•***The news story:*** Without attending the meeting, a reporter writes about a board of education decision—over the superintendent's objections—to approve a school council's proposal. The story also apparently was written without personally contacting the superintendent or any board members.

• **The motivation:** This appears to be a combination of 1: the common inability of local media editors to send reporters to every local meeting, and 2: an already poor relationship between a lazy reporter and thin-skinned superintendent.

•**The outcome:** The superintendent wrote to legal counsel, claiming the reporter, her editor and his critics were in a conspiracy against him, and asking if he could sue them for libel.

•*Comment:* The superintendent complains that the reporter didn't call him or board members for the story, but instead wrote the article based on the comments of his critics. If true, that's both lazy and unprofessional. However, in his letter to legal counsel, the superintendent admits that, during the meeting in question, he expressed strong objections before the board approved the project. So, it appears the newspaper story, while arguably incomplete, may have been accurate.

Example 4.
They Focus on the Negative
Vs. We Report the News

•***The news story:*** A reporter covers a full-agenda school board meeting, which includes a request by several teachers for significant pay hikes in next year's budget. The superintendent asks that the newspaper reporter not play up the only negative thing from the meeting, i.e., teachers' claims they are underpaid by the district. Regarding a later story, the superintendent complains that the paper reporter didn't interview him but rather took quotes published by another newspaper. He laments that he wasn't fully quoted and that the hometown paper just doesn't want to work with him.

•**The motivation:** Story #1: It's NEWS. Get over it, Mr. or Mrs. Supt. That's the story element any reporter worth his or her salt would go with. Story #2: Since there were no apparent deadline pressures involved, this sadly appears to be another case of a lazy reporter.

•**The outcome:** Perhaps because he felt ignored in previous attempts to work with the local newspaper, the superintendent failed to get in touch immediately with the reporters on a story he knew would make local news. The lesson is: Give reporters few chances to be lazy.

•*Comment:* Another superintendent once shared his secret to getting more positive news out of board meetings. He spent about five minutes a few days before the meeting personally discussing the agenda, and good news therein, with each local reporter. If you can spend five minutes ***after*** the fact grousing about negative news, you can spend a similar amount of time in ***advance*** to point out substantial and positive things the taxpaying community should know about.

Most negative news stories aren't motivated by a reporter's desire to make school leaders look bad. And while no school leaders welcome bad news, most of them aren't working to undercut reporters doing their jobs. The relationships between reporters and school leaders must be built story-by-story; sometimes it may be adversarial in the short-term, but its always better for it to remain professional in the long run.

That's the message worth getting out.

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PHOTO GALLERY: Michael Siluk . . .

I must say I find television educational. The minute someone turns it on, I go to the library and read a good book.

Groucho Marx

Yo! Joey!

Reflections of a Former School PR Director Who Later Became a Successful Superintendent of Schools.

By Joseph P. Batory

Editor's Note: Only a few PR directors go on to become school system CEOs. Joe Batory is one of those few and he served 16 years in the position. After he retired and wrote the Yo!Joey! *book, I asked him to tell* Journal *readers about the PR lessons he had learned that helped him over the years as chief school administrator.*

I retired from my superintendent's post in the Upper Darby School District in Pennsylvania in June of 1999 after 16 years at the helm. I left on positive terms *with joy and love in my heart*, which is rather unusual in these days of the administration chaos and disorder that exists in so may school districts.

Specifically, as so many school systems change superintendents every couple of years, having the kind of longevity that I did as a superintendent of schools could almost be the stuff of which a legend is made. And, as a matter of fact, that's just what one newspaper editorialized about me when I left. It actually called me *A Legend!* Gee, if the old gang from the Philadelphia neighborhood where I grew up could only hear that one! Joey, a legend? Give me a break.

Nevertheless, in these days of my glorious retirement, I am most frequently asked about my *lengthy* tenture in the 11,000 student Upper Darby School District, which serves a heterogeneous community of nearly 100,000 people. Many inquiries come from practicing and aspiring school superintendents, but I've encountered similar curiosity from a wide spectrum of professionals in all fields of endeavor.

Well, obviously there are a myriad of factors that influence success or failure as a school superintendent. But I truly believe that my grounding in public relations principles was one of the most important factors not only for my survival, but much more important, for my effectiveness as an educational leader. From 1975 until 1984, as the public information/communications officer for the Upper Darby School District, I was able to implement, improvise and adapt a wealth of practical ideas, many that I had learned from members of the national and Pennsylvania school public relations associations. My two enlightened superintendent bosses during that time gave me an open door and great freedom to create and innovate. Each sup-

ported and encouraged my pr programs and efforts, with ultimately great benefits to the school system and its community.

So here's my overview of some public relations things that worked for me. It is *not* intended to be *prescriptive*; that is, a formula that works in every case. It *is* meant to be *provocative*, to cause reflection about how the strategies/actions that I have listed might be adapted to fit someone else's individual situation.

1. Define your institution—what it uniquely is, what the staff and board believe, what they are trying to do, and why they deserve support—is the most important task for a school superintendent, and for that matter, all educational leaders. During my 16 years as superintendent, I was present at 400 consecutive public school board meetings, which became my *bully pulpit*. Of course I accented and defined what our schools were doing, but I further used this opportunity to fight back against corporate and political education bashers nationally and statewide. To my knowledge, no other colleague superintendent locally was taking such a risk. I did so because it is my strong belief that leadership is about standing up for what is right, regardless of the consequences.

At the start of each board session, I set the agenda with a prepared public statement. In that way, at least some portion of every public board meeting was *focused* on some topic of my choosing.

And contrary to the predictions of some friends who forecast my demise because of my outspokenness, the opposite occurred. Taking positions on controversial educational issues netted respect in many cases (from the news media and my friends) and perhaps a bit of fear in others (from my enemies).

Whatever the case, I was just being me! And shrinking violets in my opinion do not belong in the superintendent's chair.

2. Be visible—I estimate that I attended more than 1,400 school events and activities in 16 years, never wasting a chance to interact with a parent or citizen at large. I also delivered about 600 formal speeches inside and outside the community to friend and foe alike. And my numerous published commentary pieces in area newspapers clearly established school district positions and my own beliefs as the school system leader on a variety of issues.

3. Maintain the personal touch—I chose to reside *inside* my school district, something not always popular with school leaders. In walking the neighborhood with my wife, shopping locally and sometimes hosting unexpected parent/community visitors, I clarified more issues, built more common understanding and solved more problems than ever could have occurred in the formal setting of the administration building. Nothing works better than person-to-person contact in communication, and boy, did I ever work at it!

As a corollary, I regularly guest taught in classrooms across the school system. There is no better way to learn about students and their needs, and to bring the bureaucracy down from the clouds to better understand the classroom, where education really happens.

4. Make communication a priority—Credibility cannot be built in time of crisis. What we do every day in our relationships with students, parents, community residents and the news media through a thousand different interactions eventually will deter-

mine how our publics view us! That was my perpetual emphasis with principals and faculty as their critical responsibility to building community support.

Accessibility, openness, the willingness to listen, compromise, and the ability to admit weakness and shortcomings were our working tools.

5. Attend to students and staff—I have never hesitated to publicly honor legitimate accomplishments of students and staff. I sent thousands of congratulatory notes to faculty and pupils when they would achieve a success, minor or major. Students luncheons/breakfasts with the superintendent to celebrate some achievement were common. Sometimes I invited groups of teachers to the administration building after school hours just to tell them how valuable their service was and provide them with an out-of-pocket hors d'ouevres reception. On one occasion, I postponed a principals' meeting and then treated the group to breakfast at a before-school event. And when my maintenance staff worked around the clock on a weekend to cleanup a school after a fire, I publicly honored every one at a school board meeting and privately purchased a bottle of champagne for each individual to take home.

And one final note: Inside the district, on the morning following every school board meeting, I met with the entire administrative building staff over coffee to debrief the group on the prior evening's happenings. Those staff members became *informed key communicators.*

6. Evaluate Excellence—Comparative standardized test scores have always been a lousy barometer to evaluate schools. The obsession by many Americans with contrasting oranges and apples and bananas is hardly a valid way to properly evaluate what goes on in a school or district. With a diverse and transient pupil population in Upper Darby, generalized conclusions about our test results offered little significant evidence regarding true educational quality to the public about its schools.

And so, one of the first things that I started as a new superintendent back in 1984 was that our students and schools would *enter competitions* on a greater scale that ever before. We needed external validation for the many good things that we were doing. We would go beyond test scores to have education evaluated qualitatively from outside sources. Incredibly, some Upper Darby educators didn't understand the value of this strategy; and some were afraid to fail. However, *this was not something I offered as an option.*

Seventeen years later, the Upper Darby School District derives much of its self-esteem and pride from the numerous national, state and private sector honors and awards it has garnered in open competition.

In closing, I'm not sure what *A Legend* is, and hardly think that I'd really qualify. However, I do know that I worked public relations principles to the *nth degree.* And what success I've had as a school superintendent was largely based on sound *pr* practiced religiously every day I was on the job.

Joe Batory was awarded the Distinguished Lifetime Service Award from the American Association of School Administrators in 2000. His first book, *Yo!Joey!*, is available from the AASA at www.aasa.org.

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PHOTO GALLERY: Michael Siluk

By working faithfully eight hours a day, you may eventually become boss and get to work 12 hours a day.

Robert Frost

Make Photos an Integral Part of the PR Program

By Carol Ann DeSimine

Audience: A newly-appointed school or system public relations director who has had little experience behind a camera should find this information of value.

Capturing people talking adds a sense of drama and action to a still photo. Compare this to a static scene of three people staring at the camera or looking at a piece of paper.

Bill Mills photo

Photographs

Just reading the word brings certain images to mind. Those images could be anything—snapshots of loved ones, landscapes viewed in a museum, photos from the page of the local newspaper. Whatever the subject, these pictures have left a lasting impression in one's memory.

But why do we remember one image so vividly and not another? This is the power of excellent photography.

Research on visual communication shows that photographs are more complex than most other forms of graphic representation. Photographs are particularly effective in getting and holding the attention of low-involvement, passive publics.[1] Photos can make a message interesting to high-involvement, passive audiences as well. In either case, one should choose images that will help the reader understand and retain

Editor's Note:

The ideal photo for most educational purposes shows people doing something that conveys meaning of a message to the viewer. This will require patience of the photographer. When you walk into a room with a camera, people are quite aware of your presence. Don't make eye contact, and wait three-four minutes or longer until they resume normal activity. They will realize that you don't plan to pose them or ask them to "look this way." You will then be most likely to capture your subjects in realistic scenes.

The closeup of the two main subjects is fine—the presence of the person in the middle is not fine. A photographer must learn to see backgrounds for possible conflicting scenes. A different angle, left or right, would have blocked out the lady in the middle.

Bill Mills photo

the message that is being communicated.

Say It with Pictures

Photographs are more likely to evoke emotion than drawings and other kinds of illustrations. They're real. Viewers tend to believe them. When viewers can relate to an image, they are likely to agree with what is said in the words that accompany the picture, or believe that the words have validity.

A photograph may not tell a story better than words, but it says it first. The purpose of a photograph is to sum up, in a frame distinct from words, the mood and essence of an entire event.[2] Readership surveys consistently show that people like to look at pictures and prefer them to the printed word. They say that they can grasp the meaning of a photo more quickly than the meaning of words in a story, and that what they see is more "truthful" than what they read.[3]

Using photographs to accompany a story can capture the attention of a larger audience than words only. Photographs are especially effective in reaching the 30-second reader❖—that person who will simply flip through your publication without investing much time in reading it. An interesting photo may prompt the viewer to read the accompanying caption, and a well-written caption that provides the main elements of a message may prompt the viewer to read the entire story.

Photographs can be fun to look at, especially when they include familiar faces. When some community members receive a school newsletter or budget report in the mail, they may be prompted to open it just so they can look for people they know in the pictures. This may motivate them to read an article about an important project, achievement or proposal. If they recognize the positive impact a school and system has on their community, they may be more likely to vote "yes" on the next referendum issue.

❖Clay Schoenfeld, a professor at University of Wisconsin, developed the idea that a producer of a publication must plan for the 30-second reader (most) who only scans the publication; the 3-minute reader (some) who reads heads, subheads, sidebars and quotes; and the 30-minute reader (few) who reads everything.

Gain Maximum Impact from an Image

The first requirement of an effective photograph is that it is photographically sound; that is, it must be in focus with a true or realistic range of colors or tones. The composition or arrangement of people and objects should catch the viewer's eye and draw attention to the focal point of the picture. Details must stand out clearly against a background that is appropriate for your story. The photo must provide enough visual information for the viewer to understand the message. Content is judged according to news or feature value, and with reference to the people involved and the prominence regarding reader interest.

Because people in a community look for children and others they might recognize, include people in your pictures as often as possible. For example, if your message is that a local corporation donated computers, don't make a corporate big shot the main focus. Show students working at the computer stations, perhaps with the business representative looking on. An interesting photo shows action. To be believable, it should be candid, not posed, so subjects look natural. Kindred, Bagin and Gallagher state that *posed* pictures can contribute to a communication credibility gap that the PR person must overcome.[1] If you are documenting an event, photograph your subjects when they are involved in an activity so that they look at something or someone, other than looking at the camera, which makes the photo artificial.

A school communicator should maintain a photo file from which to pull a photo to meet a certain need at a moment's notice. Learn to anticipate

A school photographer surely will be asked to cover award presentations. People do like a visual record of the giving and receiving. But the scene in the bottom photo is inadequate. Take time to put people in proper position—they won't mind being moved about if you say please—and you can end up with an attractive grouping such as in the top photo. But don't have people shake hands for the camera, ever.

Bill Mills photo

news. Certainly at some point in the school year, a PR person will need a photo of the superintendent, a principal, teachers, student leaders, the new science lab, or even a school building. Identify "special" individuals and their achievements periodically, and capture these on film. This way one will have photos ready to go for the next publication; or better yet, when the editor of the local paper needs a space-filler and telephones you, you'll be ready to accommodate the request.

Submit Photos to the Media

Several reasons exist to submit photos to outside publications. Most often, they will accompany news stories or feature stories; sometimes they'll stand alone, with only a caption to accompany them. The most common venue for submitting photos is the local newspaper. That venue should include shoppers and weeklies, whose primary purpose is to deliver advertising to the community, because they are read by a large audience.

Chances of an editor using your news release increases if it includes one or two photos. Photographs can help break up the page of copy and make it attractive to readers. Make sure that your photos reflect the message in the release.

Having your photo published in the media is a wonderful opportunity to raise the community's awareness of what the people in a school are doing. But, because most local papers serve several school districts, you may be up against some tough competition in getting your photos published.

Here are some tips for a novice communicator when submitting photos to newspapers. Follow them and you will increase your chances of getting published.

1. Define your communication objective. Be sure the photo serves an interest beyond one classroom or family. Relate photos to issues and area events and special occasions and something new, as appropriate.

2. Find out the paper's requirements beforehand. Ideally, you should know this before you take the photographs, so you'll know whether to shoot black and white or color film. Or, if your school owns a digital camera, the editor may appreciate receiving your images in a specific digitalized format. What size print is best? Typically, 8"x10" glossy prints are preferred for action shots for publications that use black and white because editors can crop and reduce them, which may improve reproduction quality. For head shots of individuals, a 4"x5" print is sufficient. Traditionally, for color shots, 35 mm transparencies or color prints were the most common format. But again, the digital age has changed this at many publications. Find out the newspaper's method of reproduction. Some editors even have rules for the action of a gavel being passed or people shaking hands.[4] Know this beforehand to avoid automatic rejection.

3. Crop for impact. You can achieve maximum impact from editing out superfluous parts of a photo to direct focus to the main point in a shot. However, unless you print the photographs yourself, you may not be able to eliminate unwanted information. Instead, make a photocopy of the image, showing only the area you want published and send that along with the print. Or, make crop marks on your print with orange or white grease pencil to isolate the most important part of

the image. This way, the photo's dimensions remain proportional to the original.

4. Always, but always, include captions. Provide pertinent information and name all the prominent people in the photo. Keep it simple. Address only what is happening in the photo without introducing new information. When writing a caption, use action verbs in the present tense. For example: **Third grade students experiment in the new science lab of Pleasant Valley Elementary School.**

5. Provide two versions of a caption. A simple caption will be used with a photograph that accompanies a story; a longer caption should sum up the story so it can stand alone. In the latter, write it as if it were a story—headline and all. Type both versions double-spaced on white paper. Glue or tape a one-inch fold of the paper to the back of the photo, then fold the remainder of the paper over the photo for protection.[1]

Involve people with each other, and an excellent scene such as this can result. This is the founder of a national youth program signing a fan's tee shirt.

Carol Ann DeSimine photo

6. Organize your photographs before submitting them. Don't use paper clips, and don't write with a ball pen on the back of the photos. If you must write on the back, use a grease pencil. Or, type info on a sheet of paper and tape it to the photo back. If sending photos through the mail, sandwich them between pieces of cardboard to prevent damage. Write "Do not bend—photographs" on the outside of the envelope.

7. Inform the editor if a different version of the same picture is being sent to other papers. Chances of the picture being used increase if the editor knows it won't appear in another paper.[1]

8. Make sure your photographs are newsworthy. Editors often will not publish "old news," so make sure you submit photos in a timely fashion. When determining whether it is newsworthy, ask yourself: Will the information be of interest to the public? Should people in the community know this information about the school to make an intelligent judgment about the value of its work?

These are categories of newsworthy photos:

- **Important and unusual special events.**
- **Innovations, such as students working in a new computer lab or interning at a hospital or a food processing plant.**
- **New approaches to old subjects, such as a new teaching device.**
- **New staff members in newly created positions, or promotions of teachers and administrators.**
- **Foreign visitors.**
- **The demolition or construction of a building.**
- **Noteworthy performances or achievements of students.**

Although human interest shots are generally not valued for their newswor-

thiness, editors will run them on "slow news days," especially around holidays. Some examples are unusual costumes in a Halloween parade or "twists" to everyday occurrences, such as a student teaching a class instead of the teacher.

No doubt, this is a candid, unposed photo. There's only one problem: The shot of the expressive school principal is marred by a busy background. If this photo was to be used in a publication, the background could be deleted. Better yet is to not allow cluttered backgrounds.

Carol Ann DeSimine photo

Use a Checklist

Whether you are selecting photographs for a school publishing or for submission to the media, this checklist can be used to increase your success in achieving maximum impact from your images.

•Does the photo show action? Avoid standard handshakes and smiles or people looking into the camera.

•Is the image interesting? Avoid clichés, such as cute, smiling kids or speakers at a lectern.

•Is the image cluttered with people? Focus on only one or two people per image—five at most. A close-up of one student playing an instrument or a small section of an orchestra garners more impact than a shot of the entire school orchestra in action.[1]

•Does the content focus on one central idea? Too much information causes confusion.

•Is the background a distraction? Unless a busy background provides information that is important to the story, it will only detract from the message.

•Is the photo of sound technical quality? Check contrast and focus.

•Would cropping make the image more powerful or add to interest?

•Does the caption identify all individuals and describe the action in the photo?

Evaluate Effectiveness

It may be useful to evaluate your photographic efforts, especially if you are just starting out. Several ways to do this without incurring a great expense include: a face-to-face interview with a number of the school's staff and faculty; a random telephone survey of 10 or 20 people in the community; a written survey administered to parents at an open house or a PTA meeting. Ask people if they remember seeing a particular photograph and what message they received from that photograph. You may ask if they believe the photograph portrayed a situation as it actually happened.

Examine the press clippings from the local papers. Note those occasions when the local newspaper editor ran a story from the release that was accompanied by your photos as compared to those news releases without photos.[1]

Compile the results of your studies and conversations with people, and start working to improve. Chances are, the deadline for your next publication or photo opportunity is just around the corner—so get shooting!

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Carol Ann DeSimine was a photographer and publication specialist for Creative Competitions of New Jersey when this article was written. (Rowan University students were contributors for a guest editor edition [Vol. 20, No. 2]. Carol's article was not used because of space limitations.) She earned her master's degree at Rowan in public relations in 1999.

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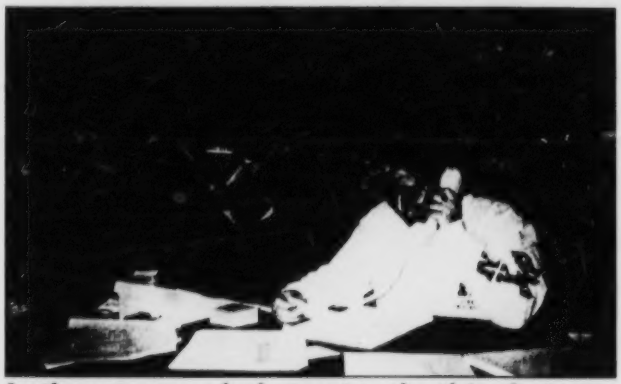
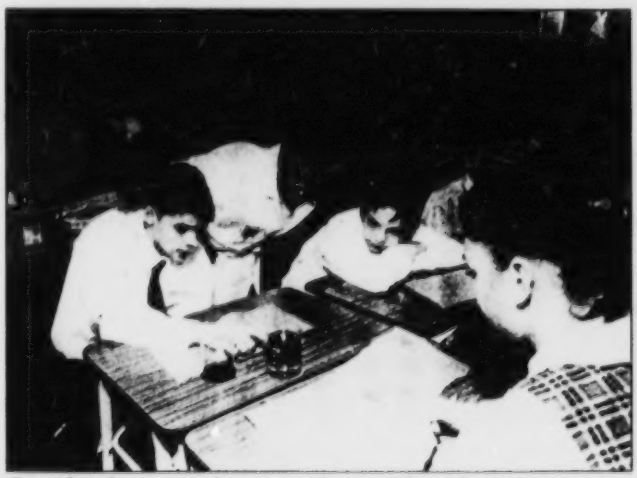


In the category of what not to do, this photo shows a too-typical scene of people looking down. The axiom of excellent photography is: Show Faces.

Laura Litrenta photo



See the faces and expressions. This shows concentration and education at work. But one cannot walk into a classroom and achieve this result in three or four minutes. The excellent photographer has patience.

Stacy Edmonds photo

PHOTO GALLERY: Michael Siluk...

Success is turning thoughts into realities.

Anon.

Parent Involvement at an At-Risk School Contributes to Increased Student Achievement

by Myrna Matranga, Barbara McLaury, George Hill and Gary Peltier

When the Bernice Mathews Elementary School opened its doors in September 1997, a considerable amount of effective parent involvement had already taken place, under the direction of principal Dr. Barbara McLaury. She and staff members used a number of public relations strategies for their "at risk" school whose demographics would have predicted little success in getting parents to school and involved.

Demographics

Opening with 605 students, the Bernice Mathews K-6 school population consisted of more than 700 students at the end of seven months. The school itself is located in the northeast Reno, Nevada, area and adjoins a community park and low income housing. The area is urban and the dominant industry is tourism. Many low-paying jobs within the hotel and gambling industry provide most of the employment opportunities for parents.

About 15% of the students have special education needs; 40% of the students are enrolled in English as a second language classes; and about 65% participate in free or reduced priced school lunches. The transiency rate is 36%; however, the attendance rate is a respectable 95%. Students are 45% Hispanic, 12% Black, 8% Asian, 1% Native American and 34% Anglo.

The School Philosophy...First Things First

Principal and staff agreed in the very beginning that their goal was to develop a professional learning community. They envisioned "concentric circles of caring" at the school site and within its educational context. Main goals were to enhance student achievement, and to build the self esteem of students. And parents were seen to be key figures in helping achieve the goals of the school.

Getting Started

The principal and staff wanted parents to be involved, supportive and a visible part of the school. Parents needed to feel comfortable, important, and valued and to know that their ideas would be heard and used. The staff set up the initial plan:

1. Dr. McLaury met with teachers during the summer, sharing class lists and planning for the school year.

2. Teachers called the parents of every student in their class to introduce themselves and to welcome them to the school family. This was something that all of the teachers wanted to do.

3. A similar hospitable approach was emphasized during student registration for those unexpected students who were transferring in from other elementary schools.

4. On the Saturday prior to the opening of school, a school/community barbecue with hotdogs and hamburgers was held. Ninety percent of the parents of enrolled students came. Students voted on a school mascot. Carnival games, face painting, and other activities with informal conversation helped to kick the year off.

5. Social services agencies, such as Community Health Services, were also included in an effort to provide an array of services to parents and generally to be helpful.

The dialogue that began at the barbecue continued through September when working relationships and governance issues were discussed at several site based meetings.

The results were that 98% of the parents attended parent conferences that October 1997.

Ongoing Strategies

Parents were employed whenever possible. A concentrated effort was made to hire teacher aides from among the parent groups, especially those in need of employment. Many of the parents hired were bilingual, and some were Black males. Each of the dominant ethnic groups of the student population, both male and female, were represented in the staffing of these positions.

Parents were involved in directing activities. One major success was the initiation of a soccer team coached by Hispanic fathers. Many parents "work" at school. Employees and volunteer parents work together to extend the curriculum where possible. A parent is teaching knitting and crocheting to students as an avocation skill.

The school is home to 15 foster grandparents who provide valuable one-on-one tutoring in reading and language arts. Grandparents, parents, university students and community volunteers provide a variation of adults who work with the children.

ESL classes for parents are held two nights a week. These classes are conducted by certified teachers and community representatives. Also, parents teach other parents entry-level job skills, and classes in initial home ownership.

How a principal approaches teachers/staff to accomplish tasks

1. Principal meets with teachers during the summer.
2. Teachers make personal calls to all parents.
3. Teachers reach out to new students and parents.
4. Hold an all school get-together function before school begins.
5. Involve and include community agencies.
6. Employ parents whenever possible.
7. Involve a rich array of academic tutors.
8. Recognize and celebrate student achievements.

In addition to the typical PTA activity, an Hispanic Family Committee was established to advise the administration of its unique needs. One outcome of the committee was the Valentine's Day Family Night Dinner. The result was that parents feel at home in the school and have a sense of ownership.

Conclusion

The school buzzes with activity but, make no mistake, the focus is on instruction...teaching and learning. It's the climate, sense of community, and diversity that strikes one when entering the school. The energy and commitment of the principal, teachers, students and parents are obviously making a difference because they are all pulling in the same direction. Engagement of parents and a developed sense of community have been the keys to success.

Myrna Matranga is now emeritus faculty in the Department of Educational Leadership at the University of Nevada, Reno 89557-0201.

Barbara McLaury is principal of Bernice Mathews Elementary School, Washoe County School District, 425 E. Ninth Street, Reno 89502.

George Hill is associate professor, and Gary Peltier is professor, also at the University of Nevada, Reno.

Dr. Matranga initiated this article several years ago. She taught school public relations at the University. Dr. Peltier reports that the university staff is involved in a 10-year study in the public relations activities and tracking of student progress. He cites gains in achievement of 4th graders of 10 points in math, 9 in reading, 6 in science and 18 in language since the school was opened.

PHOTO GALLERY: Stacy Edmonds

A tragic thing I know about human nature is that most of us tend to put off living. We dream of some magical flower garden over the horizon, instead of enjoying the roses blooming outside our own window today.

Dale Carnegie

The Bump in the Principal's Road May Veer His Career Off Track

By Phylis West Johnson

The City of Clear View

Clear View, a medium-sized university town in Central Illinois, boasted 30,000 residents. The city's welcome sign read "The Center of Excellence." Oddly enough, the city was located directly in the center of Illinois. The joke, however, was that Clear View was the center of everything in the middle of nowhere. The state university was the primary employer for the area, and it was well respected with regards to academics, especially in life and agricultural sciences. The city had a little bit of everything—a modern mall, a couple of chain bookstores, lots of restaurants, coffee houses, and specialty shops, as well as a big lake with a sandy beach area and several parks with play areas for children. The city was the best-kept secret for a great place to live in the United States. And, this summer had been exceptionally pleasant in Clear View.

Ryder Mans the Helm

"Ah, the start of the school year," sighed Ronald Ryder, 30. The cool breeze swooshed through his large window, and attempted to blow some papers off his desk. "Didn't get me that time, Mr. Wind," thought Mr. Ryder, smiling. "Nobody can get the best of Ronald today—not today at least," he said under his breath.

Now in his fifth year at Clear View High School, Mr. Ryder had become principal and was eager to begin the new school year. Principal Landstill had appointed Mr. Ryder as his assistant mid-year after vice principal Shelby Peters resigned because of her failing health. Toward the final months of the school year, Mr. Landstill announced his retirement, and recommended Mr. Ryder as his likely successor. At this rate, he would be superintendent before he was 35, he mused.

Actually, Mr. Ryder was a good man—hardworking, knowledgeable, and organized, yet far from dynamic in the classroom. Principal Ryder liked physics, which he taught for four years, but his ultimate goal was to be a school administrator. That's why since his graduation, nearly five years ago, he had worked on an on-line graduate degree from the School of Management at The Proctor Institute in Southland, California. He lucked out; his degree did not require residency. He transferred 15 hours from the local university, and the rest he did on-line. Still, he spent many long nights reading and researching as part of his class assignments and his thesis on "New Trends in School Management at the Secondary Level in Illinois" that received first place in a national academic contest.

Indeed, that award probably cinched his promotion into administration more than his actual interview did with Superintendent Marie Clare Vinters, a veteran CEO who was well-respected in

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the community and among scholars at the nearby university.

Supt. Vinters, 54, had told the aspiring administrator that she was looking for a "hungry, ambitious candidate"—someone who wanted her job one day—someone who would re-ignite the academic spark at the secondary level. Vinters, like Ryder, loved the sciences. Her teaching specialty was calculus. She had been an administrator for nearly 20 years.

She appreciated the value of having a widely acclaimed higher learning institute within her district. She had attempted to inspire the former principal, Lance Landstill, now retired, to lean heavily on the university for resources and expertise, but he was only interested in reading Modern Maturity and playing weekend golf. The former principal couldn't (or wouldn't) focus beyond the day-to-day routine, and "spent too much time talking to teachers and students," said Supt. Vinters on many occasions.

Principal Ryder knew his subject matter sufficiently, but he had a problem relating to students. The students would laugh behind his back and call him a "nerd." But Supt. Vinters liked his "intensity"—his drive to succeed. His people skills would improve with time, she thought.

On the other hand, Ryder didn't believe that the had any problems with relating to students or his colleagues. Rather, he was merely misunderstood. With a little coaching from his older brother, Ryder decided to change his look, and even his attitude and image. His brother—a broker on Wall Street—helped him trade in his bow ties and tweed jackets for a few classic, tailored suits.

"Come on! You're a principal, not Drew Carey. You need to do something with that hair," observed his brother, laughing.

"You think so?" Ryder mused, as he admired himself in the mirror. The new suit really made a difference in his image. "Like maybe, Michael Douglas in the movie Wall Street, or Donald Trump?" Ryder began to get excited as he imagined what he might look like with a styled coiffure.

"Well, not quite Donald Trump, but you need to grow some hair," continued his brother.

So he let his buzz cut grow-out over the summer, and even styled his hair. Amazingly, with his broad shoulders and trim physique now accentuated, he looked more like a male model than a principal. He liked his new appearance, and beamed with excitement as he thought about the new school year.

The superintendent, back in late August from a two-week vacation, was

Principal Ryder knew his subject matter sufficiently, but he had a problem relating to students. The students would laugh behind his back and call him a "nerd."

Case Study: A Principal's Image

Three weeks into the new school year, Supt. Vinters received a troubling phone call. The local newspaper's education writer was looking into the validity of on-line degrees.

awe-struck when she first saw him at the school board's monthly planning meeting. But on the first day of school, the students and other teachers stared at him, not sure what to think or say, as he passed by them in the hallway. Principal Ryder was a changed man.

Phone Call Out of the Blue

Three weeks into the new school year, Supt. Vinters received a troubling phone call. The local newspaper's education writer was looking into the validity of on-line degrees. One of the local professors, Bette Swoop, had recently released a book, *Education From A Distance: The Truth about On-line Degrees.*

Ed, the reporter, asked, "What is your opinion about the validity and credibility of an on-line degree?"

Supt. Vinters, puzzled, hesitated for five seconds, then asked, "Why are you asking me?"

"I understand that your new principal —Ronald Ryder—was a graduate of The Proctor Institute, which was listed in Ms. Swoop's book as one of the five 'worst' on-line universities."

Supt. Vinters, who had been in the media's line of fire on several occasions during her career, explained, "I'm sorry I'm not familiar enough with the book to comment." Then she added, "Is there a purpose to this inquiry?"

"Well, I wanted your opinion. I mean, Mr. Ryder is now the new principal, and he did receive his degree from The Proctor Institute," continued Ed.

"I don't really think the newspaper is an appropriate forum to discuss personnel issues. I would advise you to be careful on how you proceed in developing this story," said Supt. Vinter, maintaining her composure, yet obviously disturbed by his line of questioning.

"No, Ms. Swoop's book was well researched, and even hailed by some educational experts and the national media," added Ed.

"Frankly, I doubt if the national media has the expertise to evaluate the validity of a graduate degree. And I would like to know the names of these so-called educational experts. Can you provide me their names?" said Supt. Vinters sternly to the reporter. "Again, you better be able to support your accusations fully, with more than just opinion."

"Well, I don't know their names right off the bat, but—," continued the young reporter, now feeling confused and intimidated by the turn of the interview.

"Further, this is not the time nor venue to discuss such issues," interrupted Vinters. "Thank you for your phone call."

What About This Proctor Institute?

Supt. Vinters paused for a moment, trying to recollect her thoughts after the phone call.

"Bette Swoop? Where did I hear that name? That's right, she was the professor who wrote a book promoting controversial parenting practices about two years ago," mumbled Vinters as she searched for Ryder's file. She pulled out his vitae, and noted that he had two bachelor's Degrees—one in Physics and another in Education—from Texas Science University, a well-respected Carnegie Institution. But what was The Proctor Institute? Was the reporter and Swoop correct in their assessment of the institute as a diploma mill? Why didn't she question his degree? Yes, she knew that he was enrolled in an on-line graduate program, but she never thought about from where. Further, she never thought of advising him (or any other teacher) to research a graduate program thoroughly before enrolling in it. Yet, why didn't SHE check his educational background more thoroughly? Indeed, the job description for the principalship did specify that the candidate must have at least a master's in school administration, but it never mentioned whether or not the degree had to be from an accredited university. She knew very little about The Proctor Institute and even if it was accredited. But there was nothing in the job description that would disqualify a candidate with an on-line degree.

Supt. Vinters called Principal Ryder into her office. She explained the situation to him, yet she was easily distracted, for she could not get over the change in his appearance. Principal Ryder was also more confident lately.

"I appreciate you concern, but I really don't think that you have the credentials to evaluate my degree—on-line or not," said Ryder, with confidence. "I worked very hard on my thesis, and I might add in a very relevant area of school management. I might even suggest that you read my book."

Supt. Vinters paused for a moment. "Book?" she thought to herself. "Now he is elevating his thesis to the status of a book?"

Then she said to Principal Ryder, "Well, maybe I will get around to it in my spare time—when I am not talking to reporters. But, forgive me if I don't understand your lack of concern on this matter. Your reputation is at stake within this community, especially within the university community."

"I worked hard for my degree, nearly four years of long nights. I resent this conversation," continued Ryder. "I think you are just jealous." And Principal Ryder stormed out the door.

Supt. Vinter was in shock. "Did he say jealous? This guy is definitely out of touch with the real world," she thought. But it was true, she acknowledged, that she had become increasingly anxious about Ryder's new image and obvious newfound confidence.

In the midst of her confusion, Supt. Vinters started to place a call to The Proctor Institute. But she decided to hold up. "This is ridiculous," she thought.

Another Phone Call

Moments later Jared Jacob, one of her school board members, called the superintendent.

"Yes, Jared," said Vinters. She had tolerated Mr. Jacob's outbursts for several years now, since his election onto

the school board. Actually, Supt. Vinters had a wonderful relationship with the school board—well, until Mr. Jacob was elected. He would stir up all kinds of trouble, and the board would eventually side with her, but only after she wasted several weeks of time proving her case.

"You did it this time, lady. Ryder is a fraud. A reporter just called me and told me that your high school principal got his degree from a phony on-line diploma mill, and wanted to know what I thought," exclaimed Mr. Jacob.

"And so what did you tell him?" said Supt. Vinters, almost afraid to ask.

"I told him that we won't have any fraud as our principal. We will definitely find out who is responsible for this mess," responded Mr. Jacob.

"Have you any idea of what you said—what you did?" exclaimed Supt. Vinters. "Are you insane?"

"No, Missy. As I see it, it is your problem," said Mr. Jacob, before hanging up the phone.

Superintendent Vinters was having a bad day. A cold breeze blew into her window, and papers swirled about and slid to the floor. She sat behind her desk motionless, as she attempted to sort out all the details. What would be her next move?

Case Response

Make A Positive Example of the Principal

by Kay Mueggenburg

As superintendent, it would be good to immediately seek legal counsel, and gain the insights of another professional who is aware of the community dynamics and together strategize how to handle the matter. A suit might well be filed if the accusation of fraud is printed without the facts of the situation being known. The superintendent should proceed slowly in handling the media. It is probably also a good time to have the administrative assistant screen calls to gain time to learn the issues prior to talking with the press.

A procedure should be in place for how school board members are going to handle contacts with the press. Remind the school board members that as a team they share common goals and need to work together for the good of the community. That does not mean they must agree on all issues, but that there is a procedure in place for dealing with differences prior to them being printed in the media. Ask legal counsel to remind the board members (and at the orientation of new members) of the intent of the policy in place to deal with the media and of the potential individual liability for slanderous or libelous statements made to reporters (such as Mr. Jacob's reference to Mr. Ryder as a "fraud").

One of the first things that the superintendent must do is to find out if Proctor is as bad as the university writer claims, or whether the institute is in reality comparable to other accredited graduate programs in the U.S. If Ms. Swoop is correct in her assessment of the institute, then the question becomes whether the hiring process that is in place was followed. Had Mr. Ryder's credentials been checked? It is customary that transcripts of classes and grades be included in the hiring process. In addition, references are needed. What were the requirements

Let the community members see him as an example that they too can access education from their homes and on their schedule.

for the position? Was a particular type of graduate degree necessary? Did the granting school need any specific accreditation? What role did the school board play in the interview and hiring process? Had Mr. Ryder's credential been checked?

Give the principal a chance to "save face" with the school and the community. He has made an attempt to change how he interacts with people. Compliment the positive behaviors and mold the negative and more aggressive ones. A mentor besides the Wall Street broker brother may also help with the transformation process. Consider having the same legal counsel consult with the principal on how they as a team will deal with the community publicity. Model the verbiage that may be used to help all those involved see him as a professional who leads carefully and as a team player. It is not necessary to challenge the credibility of Swoop's book. Stick with the facts that the principal met the hiring requirements as evidenced by the degree, transcript and references.

This situation could be a teachable moment for the community to learn that the "star" principal took the iniative to gain his graduate degree online while he maintained his full time work and family obligations. Let the community members see him as an example that they too can access education from their homes and on their schedule. This gives Mr. Ryder a chance to maintain his credibility in the community. After the situation becomes calmer in the community, ask Mr. Ryder if he would be willing to present his research at a small gathering of the university community and school board so they could gain a better understanding of his insights and philosophy toward school management.

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PHOTO GALLERY: Michael Siluk . . .

You can't buy memories. You have to make your own. They are the best investment in time you can create. They appreciate in value as you age, and at some point in your life may be the only thing you have of any meaning.

Richard E. Mallery

Photo Credits

Addresses for photographers whose work we are using in this *Journal* issue

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The photos by **Laura Litrenta** and **Carole Ann DeSimine** were taken at Rowan State University, Glassboro, N.J.

Mission Statement
The mission of *School Public Relations Journal* is to enhance student achievement and staff accomplishment. This is done by stimulating those people who operate schools to communicate with, and build relationships among, all people in the greater school district community.

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Two Quizes

One provides a useful message

Quiz One

- Name the five wealthiest people in the world.
- Name the last five Heisman trophy winners
- Name the last five winners of the Miss America contest.
- Name five people who have won the Pulitzer prize.
- Name the last half dozen Academy Award winners for best actor or actress.
- Name the last decade's worth of World Series winners.

How did you do?

The point is few of us remembers the headliners and personalities of yesterday. These were not second-rate achievers. They are the best in their fields. But the applause dies. Awards tarnish. Achievements are forgotten. Accolades are buried with their owners.

Quiz Two Here's another quiz. See how you do on this one.

- List a few teachers who aided your journey through school.
- Name three friends who have helped you through a difficult time.
- Name five people who taught you something worthwhile.
- Think of two people who have made you feel appreciated and special.
- Think of five people who you enjoy spending time with.
- Name half a dozen heroes whose stories have inspired you.

The people who make a difference in our lives are not the ones with the most credentials, the most money, or the most awards. They are the ones who care. Send a special "Thank You" to those people who have made a difference in your life.

-Anon.

SCHOOL PUBLIC RELATIONS

Journal

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Formerly the Journal of Educational Relations

Promoting student achievement through positive school home community relationships Vol. 22 No. 4 • 2001

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Notes from the Editor

A Thousand Bylines Later.....

This edition is the last and 90th *Journal* to be edited and published by the undersigned. (See the next item about the new editor/publisher.)

We began the publication in 1975, believing that there is a need for a periodical to, first, help school officials communicate well and to, second, be an outlet for PR specialists, CEOs and professors to share their public relations knowledge with their peers.

We cannot assess how well the first goal is being met. But the second goal has been an ongoing success. The *Journal* has been the channel for more authors and writers than I can count. Their written expressions have covered all aspects of the educational PR field, from practice to theory, from what-to-do to what-not-to-do, from research to forecasts.

...A New Team Takes Over

The new publisher as of January 2002 is Scarecrow Education Press of Lanham, Maryland. Thomas F. Koerner, former executive secretary of the National Assn. of Secondary School Principals, is editorial director for Scarecrow and a member of the editorial advisory board for the Press.

The new editor is Theodore J. Kowalski, professor at the University of Dayton. He has been a frequent contributor to this and other journals on communication management issues. He is the editor or the college text *Public Relations in Schools*, 2nd Edition (Merrill/Prentice Hall) and is the author of 12 books on education administration. Dr. Kowalski is a former teacher and school superintendent.

The new publisher and editor are skilled in their fields. I am sure they will deliver a magazine that will be helpful to school administrators and contribute valuable information to the body of knowledge in this field.

Free Back Issues For Reference, Classroom Use

We are clearing our files of all back issues of the *Journal*. They are free for the asking–we do ask that you send a check for postage.

We will ship groups of 20 or so editions for $7 for each group, or $10 for two groups (no purchase orders can be accepted).

For higher education institution addresses, we will send multiples of two to four editions. For other addresses, we will send as many different editions as possible.

Of course, supplies are limited, especially of early editions. Be sure to specify a street or building address, not Post Office boxes. Send checks to the SPR Journal, Box 657, Camp Hill PA 17001-0657.

Thanks Are in Order

For 25 years, this journal survived only because of the support of hundreds of subscribers and contributors. On behalf of our readers, I thank them.

In addition, the efforts of a number of people were especially noteworthy. They include Roy K. Wilson, the late Thomas E. Robinson, Phil and Phylis West, Larry Ascough, Don Gallagher, Mel Heller, Larry Decker, Don Bagin, Art Steller, Bill Mills, Geri Kody, Ted Kowalski, and Dorothy Rich. My spouse, Joan, has always been a key element in the publication, and our son Matt has provided essential services and skill in recent years.

A person would indeed be fortunate to have had the support of so many people in an operation of this scope for so long.

We thank them and you for allowing us to produce what we hope has been viewed as a useful and stimulating product.

Al Holliday

Albert E. Holliday, Editor/Publisher

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Cartoons from Alberta, Canada:
We feature in this issue several of Jim Simpson's cartoons. These are featured regularly in the quarterly magazine published by the Alberta Teachers' Association (11010 142 Street, Edmonton, Alberta Canada. T5N2R1).
Jim's character is Ms. Magister, a teacher who has cryptic comments about education generally and the people she encounters.

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Perspectives on School Public Relations:

Challenges Yet to be Met

by Don Bagin

Introduction

Don Bagin is a professor at Rowan University—formerly Glassboro State College—in New Jersey where he initiated one of the nation's few masters degree programs in school public relations 35 years ago. Since then, he has also been a publisher (the Communications Briefings newsletter), a co-author (**The School and Community Relations** college textbook), and is a past president of the National School Public Relations Assn. He has consulted with many school CEOs, and spoken before 100,000-plus educators and boards around the nation on communication topics.

Don had an article in our first Journal in 1975. For the last of our Journals, we asked him to reflect on the practice of School Public Relations in the 1960s as compared to the 2000s.

Don can be contacted at prbag@jersey.net.

I have been fortunate to work with hundreds of school administrators and board members, not to mention more than 1,000 students in our graduate program, these past 35 years.

From that work and my experiences in business and association service, I feel justified in making this generalized statement about school PR: While I have seen minor improvements in recent years, I regret to report that most of the efforts of school administrators to communicate with their audiences are no better in 2001 than they were in 1966.

Why Has So Little Improvement Occurred?

The main reason is a lack of leadership at the college level. Decision makers on content have not insisted that people preparing for careers in education be taught how to communicate with their audiences. This need applies to all educators—teachers, counselors, specialists, principals and superintendents.

There is no doubt that a prime

requirement to be an effective administrator is that the person be able to write and speak and relate well with internal and external audiences. But little is done at most institutions in this area.

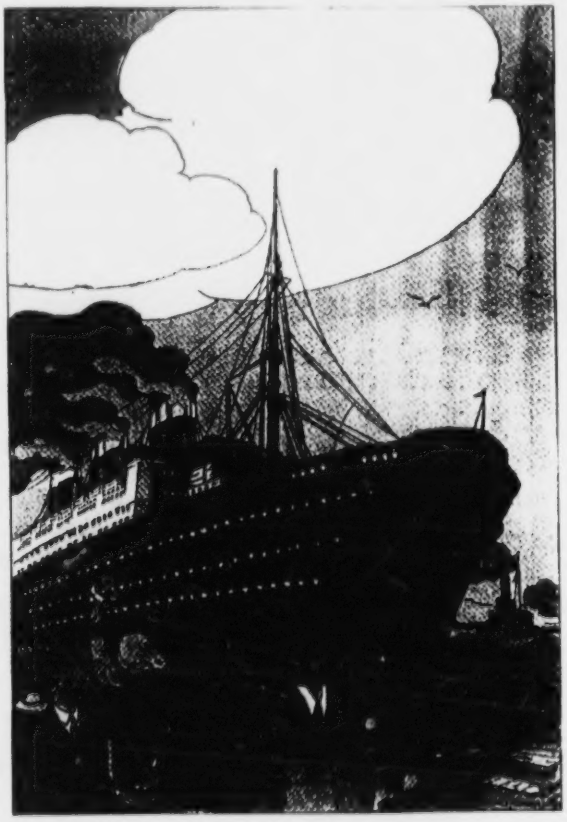
What happens is that deans and department heads in colleges of education pay lip service for the need to communicate. But when it is time for courses to be planned, these officials fall back on the strengths of their faculties, and few professors have backgrounds in school public relations. That's why students have heavy loads in curriculum and philosophy and leadership, and hardly any in how to work with parents and the media and the community. As far as we can tell, few institutions of higher education require at least one course in school public relations. We know that several hundred do offer one course, as our book **The School and Community Relations** is used as the main text, but many if not most of these courses are electives.

The result is that most education school graduates who go on to be principals and superintendents have far more difficulties working with boards of education, community leaders, parents and the media than would have been necessary if they had received a proper grounding in how to develop and operate a comprehensive school PR program at the graduate school level.

Changing the scene at the higher education level is one of six challenges I wish to pose for readers to consider as we proceed into the 2000s.

1. Instituting Coursework at the University Level

School administrators and communication specialists should work closely with and put pressure on individual schools of educational administration and education to require courses that would prepare their graduates to communicate with their audiences. Officers of chapters of the National School Public Relations Assn. might offer help in terms of speakers for courses. The reluctance of many department heads



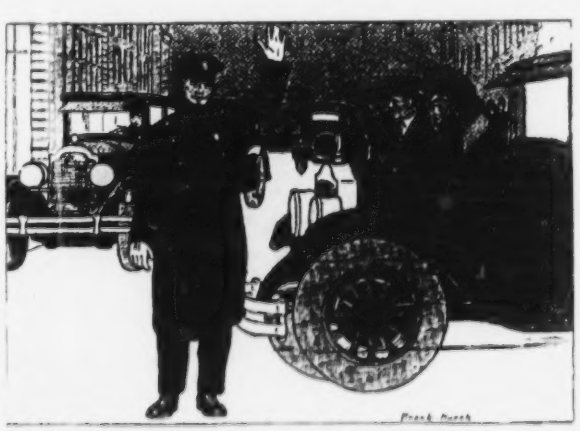
to offer a course can be tempered if they have access to someone knowledgeable in the field.

If you can't get a department to offer such a course for teachers, you might work with a regional education group to offer sessions on conducting parent conferences, working with parents to help students learn better and conducting back-to-school sessions. These topics have proved very valuable, for example, to first-year teachers in the South Jersey area who attend such sessions conducted by Rowan University.

2. Preparing Publications

One of the most common responsibilities that the public relations person has is to prepare publications. These usually include newsletters for the community as well as internal communications and special brochures that aim at recruiting new teachers or publications designed to gain understanding of a growing district that needs a new building. Sorry to say, the quality of such publications has improved very little in the last 35 years. I have judged about 40 national and regional contests to honor outstanding efforts in the field. Frequently the entries are worth about a 3 on a 1 to 10 point scale, with only few exceptions at the 9 and 10 level. The availability of computer programs to help prepare publications has prompted a proliferation of different typefaces on the same page. Some editors seem to spend more time on computer graphics than on the quality of the content.

Some school districts are blessed with publication preparers who win awards in any kind of competition. They write well, they know what topics are important for the audience and they have a solid sense of layout and design. To learn from these people, ask for a copy of their award-winning publications when the list of winners is announced each year by the National School Public Relations Association. Also, look to the community for someone who had publications responsibility for private business or government and is now retired. This kind of person will usually be glad to offer expertise to help improve the quality of your publications.



3. Helping Children Learn

One of the sometimes forgotten goals of any public relations program is to help young people learn better. This journal frequently reports on studies that show that when parents are involved in their children's education, the students do a better job in the classroom. Yet, school officials in many districts do little to nurture that involvement.

Such efforts might start with

a phone call from a first grade teacher a week before school starts asking what the parent can share that will help the teacher relate to the student, or it could be an invitation for a parent to attend a class during American Education Week. The bottom line is that "we care about you and your child and want you involved in the process of learning." This will pay dividends. A personal invitation from a teacher is much more impressive than a formal jargon-loaded letter from the principal.

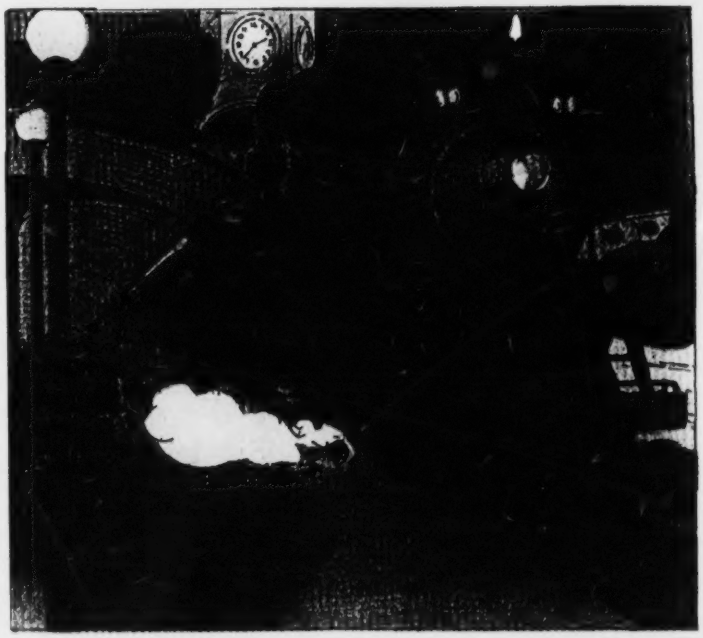
When trying to encourage involvement, one should keep the process simple. Do not expect people to invest every Tuesday night of the third week of each month for the rest of the year on an advisory committee. Instead, ask people to serve on a specific month-long committee, or ask them to serve as a key communicator, or to be a speaker on vocations day at a school.

4. Working With Key Communicators

One of the best ways that school officials have to help in the communications and public relations process is the establishment of a key communicators network. This is the only idea I've shared with hundreds of district officials that has worked every time in every imaginable kind of district. It works because:

- People have their egos played to by being asked to serve as key communicators.
- People genuinely feel that they're making a difference to help those they know understand what the educators are doing with the community's two most prized possessions: their children and their money.

Starting a the key communicators network is not difficult. Determine those individuals in the community who many people talk to and are believed by them. In some communities, they can be barbers, beauticians and bartenders. It might be someone who fixes cars at a local station or a sec-



retary at the hospital or someone working in a convenience store. Invite those people in groups of seven to nine to one meeting (and explain that they will never meet again). At that meeting have an administrator or the public relations person explain how the process works: That members of the group will be supplied details about critical issues on a regular basis, and are asked to contact a school staff member when they learn disturbing information involving school matters or people.

The staff can start a telephone chain of KC members to get the word out when they need to quickly.

Some school districts have 50 key communicators; one had 1,200. The idea is that school people deal with sparks instead of fires as they hear rumors in the embryonic stages. The staff thus has a way to communicate without being dependent on the local newspaper.

5. Developing Internal Communications

Most experts in school public relations agree that a solid internal communications program is vital. Before anything can be done externally, the people who work in the district have to be informed and knowledgeable and realize their role in public relations. Outstanding educational leaders devise ways to generate ideas of their staffs and make people feel comfortable about suggesting them. One way to determine morale in a district is to ask this question: "If you had an idea to improve the school district that would cost little or nothing to implement, would you suggest it?" In some districts that we worked with, only about 10% of the people said they would. In another district as many as 90% said they would. The difference can be accounted for by the amount of trust employees have in their superiors.

(In one school, we asked a teacher that question and he said he wouldn't suggest the idea. When we pursued that answer, he said that everybody would be polite, but nothing would ever happen. So, he said, "I do my job and I have 10 years experience and no one is going to fire me. I'm just coasting out until retirement." When we asked, "How many years do you have until retirement?" he said: "22." You can probably think of some people you work with who have that same attitude.)

Another way to prompt ideas is to distribute "I have an idea" cards to all employees. This one is designed to circumvent idea blockers, those people who will never encourage a new idea. The superintendent names an "idea mover." Everybody who has an idea sends it to the boss along with a copy to the idea mover. If the boss doesn't respond to the person who suggested the idea with a copy to the idea mover within 10 days, the idea mover checks with the boss to see why there has been no response. This helps identify those people who are clogging the system. Those people should be counseled as to what changes they need to make and what will happen if they don't.

6. Providing Inservice for Other Staff Members

One of the most forgotten areas is that of providing public relations for secretaries, custodians, bus drivers, food service workers and others who work full- or part-time in schools or district facilities. Almost all these people have never had any kind of direction in the communication area. Yet, they are responsible for what many people in the community think—of a positive or negative nature— about the schools. Frequently we conduct surveys to find out how people get the information about the schools. We learn that they get them from their friends and neighbors and school employees who live in the community. When asked to determine who they would believe if they heard various versions of a negative incident that occurred at the schools, people said they would believe a secretary over a superintendent, for example. That's why it's vital to keep all supporting service folks informed about what's going on in the schools.

An in-service program specifically designed to allow these audiences to get involved in the public relations process will pay huge dividends.

Conclusion: Make Communication a Top Priority

When the superintendent establishes goals for administrators, it's imperative that the nature and scope and the measurement of communication efforts be included. Employees in every walk in life are similar: they tend to do those things they know the boss wants to be done. That's why the CEO must establish communications goals as top priorities and when people know they will be evaluated on how well they reach those goals, they will make them a top priority.

School board members should insist that their superintendent establish communications goals on the must-do, high-priority list.

If this were to occur in most districts, my next 25-year report would be a highly positive one.

Special Needs of a Long Distance Commuting Parent with a Family

by Richard Glotzer, Beverly Curry and Anne Cairus Federlein

Introduction

In our Vol. 18, No. 3 (3rd Quarter 1997) edition, we ran an article about the challenges to educators presented by single parents with children in school. In a similar fashion, some children have a parent who is away from home for long periods of time. The long distance commuter family—referred to as the LD commuter in this article—also represents a need for special attention by teachers and administrators. Principals should find this article of value.

Long distance commuter marriages typically involve one spouse, working away from the family home, who occupies a separate domicile during the working week or for longer periods of time. The other spouse lives in the family residence, often with responsibility for household maintenance and supervision of children, and is usually employed outside the home.

Estimates are that there are up to a million couples and families involved in LD commuting.[3] Such commuter families are not organized into a formal interest group or association, so that makes obtaining accurate numbers difficult. According to Cornell University, dual income families now constitute 53.7 percent of all families, with 71 percent of married mothers with children under 18 in the workforce.[2]

This article suggests that educators may face new challenges as numbers of LD commuter families grow. Educators can play an important role in helping LD commuter parents remain connected to their children's schooling and educational activities.

While there has been general discussion and awareness of LD commuter marriages since the late 1960s, there has been relatively little research on them.[1] Moreover the emphasis on upwardly mobile *dual-career* rather than *dual-income* families has largely ignored the number of commuters engaged in other occupational categories as well as LD commuter marriages among minority groups like African-Americans.[4] Military personnel, those employed in

trucking, the railroads and airlines, sales and the skilled trades, to name a few occupational categories, have long managed family life within a framework of long parental absences from the home. Thus the realities of these families cross the traditional racial and social class divisions of our society.

Having a LD commuter parent can be a difficult emotional adjustment for children, especially those accustomed to having both parents at home. With divorce an all too common occurrence, children may wonder about the stability of their own families and may initially see a parent being away a long time as the first step toward divorce. For the resident parent filling the role of both parents, household maintenance and managing the demands of their own jobs can be daunting adjustments to make.

Adapting to such commuting can be difficult. Worries about children and home are joined by the emotional and physical wear and tear and the vagaries of travel. Experiencing difficulty in separating work from leisure, loneliness and being removed from active parenting are also common problems. Working through the culturally laden assumptions of how married people with families should live and work is also difficult. Although LD commuter marriages are becoming more common, these marriages still conjure up public doubts about commitment to one's spouse, children and family.

In our own research, still in its early stages of interviewing commuters, our interviewees report experiencing these public doubts.[5] Many report the casual "I don't know how you do it," from a friend sounds more like "Why in the world are you doing this?"

Educators Can Help

Educators can help blend commuter families into the school environment by communicating to students that they need to accept differences in some family situations. For example, at student assemblies or PTO meetings, school personnel might include commuter families when discussing the diversity of families in the school or community. The staff might also include information about commuter families and students in their in-service programming. Recognizing the unique character of LD commuter families fits well with three categories of tasks—fostering new meanings about diversity, promoting inclusive practices within schools, and building connections between schools and their communities.[6]

With many communities embracing the concept of family-school partnerships, school personnel and families can often collaboratively identify needs that children in these families might have.[7] These children's home lives are unique and such children benefit from the staff's recognition of their circumstances.

The growing numbers of LD commuter families also raise new privacy issues, although these issues appear covered by existing statutes. Confidentiality about parents' marital circumstances, rationale for LD commuting, perceived vulnerability of the family residence or parental anxiety about their children's well being are typical concerns of LD commuters. LD commuting appears more socially acceptable among urbanites and those in the suburbs as opposed to in geographic areas where such commuting is less common, and in this case parents

What Educators Can Do To Assist These Families

- Promote inclusive attitudes of all students in the school
- Encourage parents to view and use the school web site
- Encourage commuter parents' participation in school whenever possible
- Provide parents with a calendar of events, and save their children's work
- Encourage commuter parents to integrate school activities into travel plans
- Encourage parents to discuss temporary problems or special needs that arise from commuting with teachers, school counselors and administrators
- Allow students to share their experiences as children from a commuter family

may value confidentiality because of less tolerant community values.

Being Away May Not Be a Choice for a Parent

School personnel should understand that the decision to become a commuter family might stem from necessity, such as layoffs, unanticipated expenditures (illness or obligations to extended family), accommodating a partner's employment or unwillingness to disrupt children's comfort in a school or community by moving. LD commuting may be the only way of structuring work and family life that affords a family a stable and decent standard of living. The cumulative record of anecdotal information, mostly from qualitative research (including our own) suggests that multiple family strengths and resiliency are important characteristics of successful commuter families.

Dual income households are continuing to grow in number, creating many contradictory demands on families and not so subtle shifting of some parenting activities to schools. Our contemporary culture of work too often encourages professionals to embrace individualistic achievement and the rewards of high status and earnings at the expense of time and emotional involvement with family life.[5] The jury is out on whether such arrangements, which work well for childless couples or those with empty nests, can work for long periods for those in the midst of child rearing.

We do know that diversity in family forms is one of the central features of the 2000 national census. While only 25 percent of families are now involved with active child rearing, itself a major evolution in family structure, children are growing up within increasingly diverse family patterns.[6] Within that 25 percent of families with children, steady increases in labor force participation rates for mothers with young children are striking; mothers of children under six constituting 65 percent of the workforce, and mothers with children under a year old constituting 60 percent percent of the work force.[7]

As the following hypothetical case study illustrates, educators can help families as they develop informal, personalized strategies for keeping family life and children on an even keel.

The Case of the Smith Family

When Bob and Sarah Smith left their home in Seattle for Chicago, they anticipated new opportunities rather than being confronted with shortages in child-care, dual income opportunities, and the onset of serious illness for aging parents back home. The children, of early elementary school age, also found making new friends difficult and missed familiar surroundings. After the first difficult year ,the decision was made for Sarah and the children to return to their unsold Seattle home and for Bob to remain in Chicago, pursuing career and salary advancement that will at some point benefit the whole family.

Like most commuter families, the children's well-being was the top priority. During the late summer the Smiths discussed their new situation with the school principal in their West Coast community, and later with the children's teachers. In their first year of commuting, the Smiths improvised strategies for normalizing their unusual family life based on trial and error as well as tips from other commuters.

Regularity and predictability in Bob's trips home were found to be an important element in reassuring their children. The children were able to talk about their commuter family with teachers who encouraged them to express their feelings and observations in drawings and written work. Teachers and other school personnel were supportive of the children's excitement as Dad's visits approached, and made efforts to be welcoming during his school visits, encouraging the Smiths to participate in school activities. School personnel and students regarded the Smiths as an unusual, albeit intact family.

Their older child's classroom teacher agreed that Bob might assist in some basic research on school projects as well as supplying materials for such projects. This worked surprisingly well, with photocopies, paperback books and scientific apparatus coming through the mail. Both children enjoyed these projects.

The Smiths had been warned that phone bills, Internet charges and postage were a fixed, and often substantial, cost of commuting. While calling or e-mailing were often easiest, writing letters and cards, especially with enclosures, were found to be quite helpful for children—and parents. Teachers encouraged letter writing, the

Possible Recommended Practices for These Parents

- Discuss commuting fully with family members before undertaking commuting. Set goals and time limits for commuting.
- Have regular and predictable visits home. Include school visits and teacher conferences on home visits - participate in school activities whenever possible.
- Avoid bringing work home - focus on your spouse and children. Provide children with individual time.
- Avoid the Santa Claus syndrome with gifts. Keep presents small, personalized and related to children's interests and school activities.
- Vary your means of communication: letters, telephone, email, etc.

What Successful Commuter Families Do

- Commuter families maintain closeness, value and respect one another, share a common social or religious orientation, are child-centered and form friendships outside of the family.
- They devise strategies for meeting stress and crisis, and are able to ask for assistance from outside of the family.

saving of artwork and sharing presents and pictures sent by Bob. Borrowing a technique from a commuter colleague, Bob made a photo album of the community he was working in. Being able to see Dad's workplace, work mates and apartment provided the children with clearer sense of their father's life away from home and seeing their own artwork and photos decorating their father's office and household was gratifying. The album was also shared at school with teachers and classmates, and became a source of pride for the children.

The school's principal and the children's teachers also encouraged the Smiths to use the school's excellent website. Being aware of assignments and schools activities and important dates helped Bob maintain contact with the children's schooling and helped in coordinating visits home so he could participate in some school activities. The Smiths also benefited from the willingness of school personnel to hold parent-teacher conferences for them. Bob shared with many commuter parents the frustration of being removed from the day-to-day activities and progress of their children's schooling. Meeting with school personnel sent a clear signal of caring to the children and the importance parents attach to school and education. As the Smiths prepare to end their commuting experience, they are assured that the inclusive school policies will help the Smiths as they evolve back into a more traditional family form.

Conclusion

Commuter marriages with school-age children raise important issues about parenting, families and a range of issues involving school achievement and participation. Educators need to be aware of the unique features of long distance commuter families, and show sensitivity to students from such families.

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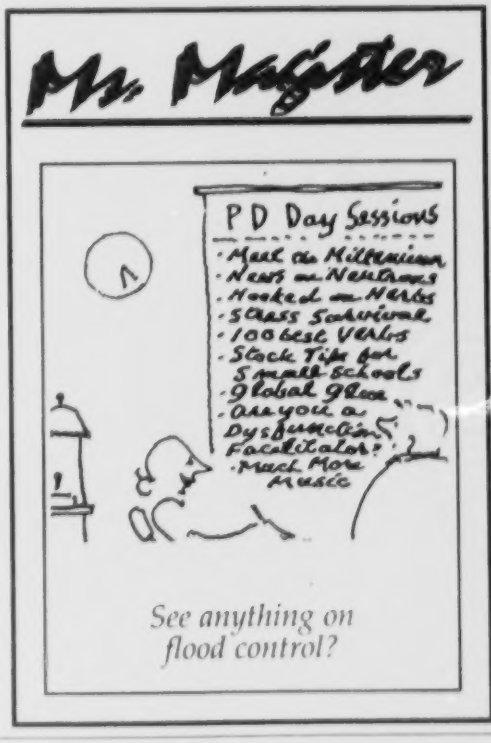

Ms. Magister
PD Day Sessions
· Meet the Millennium
· News on Neutrons
· Hooked on Verbs
· Class Survival
· 100 best Verbs
· Stock Tips for Small Schools
· Global Glen
· Are you a Dysfunctional Facilitator?
· Much More Music
See anything on flood control?

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Some of the Best of 1975-2001

by the editor

Following are excerpts of many articles from our first issue through editions of late.

Space does not allow for even mention of highlights of more than a thousand articles, items, reviews and other contributions form hundreds of education, administrators, specialists, university professors, teachers and others.

Your editor has picked a cross section of items that have relevance today or offer insight and tips to problems and issues that continue to deserve our attention.

Note that we use the job titles and locations of authors that were current at the time of first publication. We are unable to contact at least half of these people now.

(In most cases, the excerpts are only a portion of the original article. You may obtain the full text of any article. Note the number after the issue date of an item. That represents the number of pages of the article. We are charging 50 cents per page for copying and 1st class postage. Tell us the names of articles and enclose payment—no purchase orders, please—accordingly. We will process your order promptly.)

We hope that you find some answers or stimulators in these lines from the recent past.

The Whys of Communication

Why Some People Don't Communicate Well

Poor Communication Can Be a Pathway to Power

by Alfred R. Schaub, asst. professor of management, Penn State University (Berks).

September/October 1975 (2)

The use of training to overcome communications problems is founded on the premise that people don't know how to communicate well and would willingly do so if properly instructed in such areas as communications techniques. Contrary to this belief, it is my opinion that most people in work organizations, particularly within the ranks of supervision and management, do know how to communicate in a very satisfactory manner. Their failure to communicate is, in most cases, one aspect of their conscious or unconscious quest for power.

There are at least five ways in which the practice of poor communications can enhance a supervisor's or manager's power within the work environment. Each is related to the solution of a specific power-related problem. The problems and solutions are:

1. Seldom is there adequate time to do everything which needs to be done or to act upon all matters of importance.

Communicating with others is very

frequently one of the low-priority activities which never gets done. The reasons for this are: (1) communicating adequately can often be very time consuming, (2) the payback value is often invisible and lacking in concreteness, and (3) a good many of our communications are of more benefit and reward to others than to ourselves. Thus, in seeking control over the world around us, we give lip service to communications while giving time and energy to more visible, self-serving activities. This is probably the most common cause of poor communications.

2. Withholding information and knowledge from others is an effective way of denying power to perceived competitors.

Information (knowledge) is one of four primary sources of power for people in work organizations, the other three being money, position and charisma. Withholding information from internal competitors is one way to enhance one's power and position within the organization.

3. Confrontation with others can be avoided through the practice of poor communications.

Since people frequently differ with each other, with some of these differences being vast and emotionally loaded, speaking out and clearly expressing oneself can be a direct pathway to confrontation with others and their ideas, values, and attitudes. Therefore, it is better not to communicate when the matter involves controversial issues.

4. Sabotaging communications is an effective way to display hostility toward the organization or persons within it.

It is not unusual for the wants, needs, plans, and ideas of people to be frustrated in the course of their activity in work organizations. Anger and hostility are natural responses to frustration. However, open and direct expression of anger is discouraged: and sometimes punished in most work organizations.

5. Bearers of bad news often lose their heads.

People who impart bad news to over-burdened organization superiors are often viewed with disfavor. A failure to communicate problems upward can result in their getting much worse. But if someone else can be trapped into bearing the news and perhaps being blamed for the event, then the person who avoided bearing the bad news greatly benefits from the situation.

Training people in the techniques of communication is a fine and worthy endeavor. However, knowing is not enough. Work organizations must structure their internal fabric in such a way as to encourage application of what we know is right, while discouraging such things as poor communications as a pathway to power.

Why People Don't Communicate Well

Five Reasons Why Educators Communicate Poorly

Floyd T. Christian, Florida Supt. of Public Instruction

1st Quarter 1977 (4)

First, educators have a false impression about their ability to communicate. This is easy to understand. Naturally, we find it difficult to even consider the possibility that we are not capable of gaining support for new ideas and new programs.

But many of us fail to realize that communications is not concluded when knowledge is disseminated. This is only one-third of the process. Communications involves disseminating information, getting a response and evaluating that response.

Second, educators are not accustomed to competing for people's attention. Many veteran educators find it distasteful to enter the public arena and challenge special interest groups for the right to be heard.

Third, many educators operated in obscurity for so many years that they were completely unprepared for the public's recent but accelerating interest in their activities. They consider it inappropriate that their activities should be held up for public scrutiny.

Fourth, educators have such a high regard for their colleagues' professional ability that they unconsciously minimize the value of outside opinion. All too frequently, we make decisions based entirely on the judgment of those within our academic circles.

The fifth characteristic of a professional educator that inhibits effective communication is that most professional educators--particularly those in administrative positions--have little communication experience and almost no meaningful communications training.

If...School PR People Were No Longer

by Judy Parker and Wash. SPRA members

3rd Quarter 1990 (7)

Who would handle the district publications, internally and externally? Who would handle the media relations?

Who would manage crisis response for the school district? Who would be responsible for PR management and administration?

Who would act as chief spokesperson for the school district? Who would develop internal marketing of the school district?

Who would chair and/or facilitate

community-oriented committees? Who would be the communications voice at Administrative Cabinet, Council or Management Team meetings?

Who would provide input from the public or community? Who would handle sensitive special projects and see them through to the end?

Who would write, lay out, design and take photographs for district publications? Who would ensure information is submitted to the media in accurate, timely fashion?

Who would be the "one-stop" source for newcomers or those with queries about the district, including demographics, programs, budget, test scores, et al?

Who would represent the district at service club meetings and other functions? Who would be responsible as the district liaison for levy and bond issue information?

Who would coordinate community education? Who would coordinate the volunteers?

Who would supervise the print shop?

Who would serve as the district ombudsperson?

Purposes of School PR

Four Components of School PR
by Al Holliday, editor
1st Quarter 1990 (6)

At the heart of an effective and dynamic school district is a structured program of school-community relations involving all of the district's internal and external publics. The four components of the program are:

1. A positive and challenging school climate in which optimal student achievement and staff productivity are fostered.

2. Maximum involvement of parents, at home and in school, in their children's educational development.

3. Participation of the community-at-large (citizens, business people, retired people, key communicators, officials and staff of other educational institutions) in cooperative learning practices to make full use of human and other learning resources in the community.

4. Communication-information processes so that residents of the community can develop an understanding

and appreciation of the successes, challenges and needs of their school system that will lead to their financial support.

Staff Relations

A 15-Question PR Test for Principals

by staff members of schools in Alhambra, Ca.
2nd Quarter 1981 (1)

1. Do you encourage teachers at your school to send notes home commending children for the smallest of accomplishments?

2. Do you remind your staff frequently to take five minutes at the close of the school day to review major points in instruction covered during the day?

3. Do you encourage teachers at least once a month to channel information through your office which can be the source of a news story for the local press?

4. Do you belong to a community service club or organization?

5. In the last month, has your school been a host for a mini-tour of senior citizens, realtors, service club members, parents who are not PTA officers, parochial school representatives, or others?

6. Do you occasionally drop in at the home of a child who has been having unusual difficulty of some kind?

7. Do you encourage your staff to use community resource persons for visits and talks in the classroom?

8. Does your school have a "buddy" system or big sisters or brothers to help newcomers feel more at ease in their new school surroundings?

9. Have you made arrangements to schedule coffee hours at least once a month in the home of someone in the community during the evening for parents who work to meet with you?

10. Do you have a "Hall of Fame" bulletin board where photographs, brief biographies of former students, or newspaper accounts about them can be displayed?

11. Have you taken notice whether visitors to the office (parents or students) are acknowledged promptly and helped in a friendly, understandable manner?

12. Have you taken any postgraduate courses recently in public relations, communications, or school-community relations?

13. Do you commend teachers in a note to them concerning unusual, successful, or outstanding accomplishments?

14. Do you have a full staff meeting at least once a year involving custodians, office personnel, food services employees, and teachers so they may all have an opportunity to meet and discuss common problems?

15. Do you always communicate with your staff, students, and parents well in advance of any major change or implementation of new decisions?

Operating the PR Program

A Teacher Who Streeses PR Will Gain Fine Feedback

by Claudia Cuddy, a former teacher and assistant principal, Pitman, NJ, Schools.

3rd Quarter 1982 (2)

Stimulated by a speaker at a graduate school PR seminar at Glassboro, Claudia wrote her own Personal Achievement System for use when she taught 5th graders. Following are statements of a few of the 45 goals she set for herself to achieve, and her comments about how well they did or did not work in one year.

Send postcards to kids a few days before school started to give an advance welcome.	Kids didn't mention them at all. Two parents did.
Make personal phone calls to all parents to invite them to the Back to School night.	20 out of 21 parents came!
Send birthday cards to each student, and thank you notes to students if they gave me something (an apple, a flower, a hand-made holiday card, etc.)	Very impressive results. Kids keep everything of a praiseworthy nature— even tack them on walls. Much to the annoyance of some parents.
Spend 1/2 hour eating lunch with individual children during the year.	This proved to be the best activity of the year. Children love individual attention.
Visit with parents of each child in homes at least once during the year.	A terrific activity. Made it to all but four homes. Ran into scheduling problems—will try to visit them this summer.
Wear a dress on Art Night sewn with material which the students had decorated with flow-pen markers.	Wow! Fantastic. Students were really impressed.
Send home a ditto report on the state-sponsored tests the fourth graders took.	Nobody seemed to care.
Send note to senior citizen center. Invite seniors to visit our classroom during Senior Citizen Week.	Didn't get to. Will definitely next year.
Write about classroom activities for the local paper at least three times this year.	Yes. Did it and received good articles. Worthwhile.
Attend at least three school board meetings.	Liked going. Attended four.
Include superintendent on list for Christmas and Mayday cards from the class.	No response.
Spread the happy note idea to other teachers—when something goes well, write a praise note.	Teachers said it takes too much time.
Send thank you notes to principal, PTA, others for anything they do for us.	PTA women told me they appreciated them.

PHOTO GALLERY: Dale D. Gehman

Start every day with a smile
and get it over with.

W.C. Fields

Involve Teachers in PR

by Bonnie Ellison, PI director, San Antonio, TX, Schools
1st Quarter 1985 (1)

These are tips for a school PR director to involve teachers, directly or indirectly, in PR.

- Suggest that the teachers frame their diplomas and hang them in their classrooms.
- Always credit the teacher's role in a student's achievement in awards presentations. The news release should read, "Wanda Winters, whose art teacher is Sally R. Smith, won the Shrine poster contest this week."
- Urge the teachers to use the last minutes of each class period or school day to summarize the answer to the question, "What did we do in school today?"
- Double the distribution of the school newsletter or the principal's memo. Ask your teachers to give two copies to each student. One for the parents and an extra copy to be hand-delivered to a neighbor, friend or relative who has no children in school.
- Install a rumor control chart in the teachers' lounge. Leave space on a blackboard, or poster board for filling in (1) What I heard, (2) Who's going to check it out, and (3) The facts.
- Poll your teachers to determine where communication gaps exist in the school or system. Commit yourself to filling in the gaps.

Special People

Students Have Rights, Too

by students, Tallmadge, Ohio, High School
4th Quarter 2000 (1)

When students learned their teachers did not know of any bill of rights for school students, they wrote their own. Among the rights specified are these 10:

1. Each student and faculty member has the right to be provided with a safe learning environment (safe from violence, environmental concerns, and structural defects).

3. Each student has the right to have positive role models (teachers, administrators and board members) who stress achievement and public pride in our school district.

4. Each student has the right to an education at public expense equal to that of other students in surrounding districts.

5. Each student has the right to professionally trained and certified staff members who stress positive learning programs and atmosphere.

10. Each student has the right to express personal opinions at appropriate times and places.

11. Each student has the right to learn in an environment free from mental, emotional, or physical threats (including sexual harassment).

13. Each student has the right to receive proper "due process" procedures from teachers, administrators, and board members, and the right to petition them for a redress of grievances.

14. Each student has the right to file any complaint of misconduct or inappropriate behavior with the proper officials and receive a prompt reply to the matter.

15. Each student has the right to privacy and confidentiality regarding personal and medical records unless otherwise waived by the student and/or parents.

18. Each student has the right to be accepted for his/her individuality and not to be subject to unnecessary conformist behaviors unrelated to educational goals.

Key Communicators Should Be Your Best Friends

by Don Bagin, professor of communications, Glassboro State College, New Jersey

July/August 1975 (3)

Intro: Don took an idea used in business and public service agencies and tailored its use for educators.

The key communicators concept provides the basis for that network in many school districts throughout the country. It works in small districts and large. It's effective in rural regions and in urban areas. It's really an "authorized grapevine" that operates to get the real story out to citizens quickly and with credibility.

Discuss the concept with the school staff, and develop a mailing-contact list of 25-50 people (depending on the size of the district) who are your community's Very Important People.

Key communicators are those adults and students who talk to and are believed by a large number of people. In a crisis, KCs pass along correct information to these people and help squelch rumors and combat misinformation.

KCs don't necessarily show up on an organizational chart of major community organizations. Nor are they always a part of what is considered the formal power structure of the school or community. But they do come in contact with lots of people.

A key communicator might be:

- A barber, hair stylist or bartender who has a daily captive audience.
- The owner of a hoagie shop popular with students.
- A dentist or doctor.
- A retired junior high school custodian who likes to "chat" about members of the school family.
- A school secretary who is involved in two bowling leagues, three community charitable groups and who is related by marriage to 32 families in the district.
- A student who is highly respected by peers.

But you must share information with the KCs on a regular basis. Send them background reports—on the proposed budget, or teacher turnover, on new construction, on possible school closings. Send them the two-three page board agenda (delete personal items) and an action follow-up. Do whatever you can to make the KCs an informed group of people and they in turn will spread the word about the district and what it is trying to do.

The instant KC process allows people to know they have an important role in the schools. And it usually causes them to give the school officials the benefit of the doubt if a problem arises, especially if those officials have been honest all the time.

12 Ways for Administrators to Develop Positive Teacher-Parent Relationships

by Art Steller, asst. supt., Shaker Heights, Ohio, Schools and Donald M. Knox, professor, Ohio University, Athens.

4th Quarter 1981 (4)

1. Make it a must during the hiring process to explain to teaching candidates and all other personnel what each person is expected to do concerning relations with the public.

2. Establish "positive two-way communication with parents" as a goal for the school.

3. Have every teacher and staff member plan at least one personal goal to develop an improved "relationship with parents" or some similar category each year.

4. Ask teachers and other staff members who have children in school to describe their feelings toward the school their children attend.

5. As the administrator, try to handle the extremely critical and/or overaggressive parents yourself.

6. Set the pace in your school by being open, polite and candid with everyone. A good example communicates a hundred times more than a list of rules and regulations.

7. Make it a point to pass on compliments to all faculty and staff, frequently. Give recognition when it is due.

8. Encourage as much person-to-person communication as possible. Suggest to teachers that they call or send a note home to parents informing them of something good about their child.

9. Ask the P.T.A. to sponsor a luncheon for the staff on an inservice day.

10. Foster the habit, on the part of the staff and yourself, of thanking volunteers for the assistance they render the school. Compliment people in the presence of others.

11. Conduct inservice sessions on "how to hold successful parent-teacher conferences."

12. Promote the development of a plan to use school volunteers and be sure that teachers recognize what the public is doing to support the schools beyond the paying of taxes.

Teachers, administrators, staff members, board members and parents play a most crucial role in the total school-community relations program. If exchanges among these groups transpire in an atmosphere of trust, understanding and confidence will surely result.

Involve Your Local Business People, Directly

by Donald Hymes, editor, Montgomery County, MD Schools

1st Quarter 1993 (1)

Involving local business leaders in the affairs of the school and the school district makes a lot of sense all the way around.

- Don't be shy about asking business leaders how they can help students and the schools. Remind them that a healthy educational system means a healthy business environment.
- Establish a Business/Industrial/Educational Council as a continuous forum to promote and encourage communication and cooperation between industry and schools.
- Develop a speakers bureau of business leaders in the community who are willing to serve as classroom speakers (K-12) to discuss careers and training.
- Work with local business groups to arrange plant and office tours for students.
- Get to know local business leaders by offering the school cafeteria for breakfast or luncheon meetings of the chamber, Kiwanis or Rotary clubs, etc.
- Ask the chamber of commerce to undertake a needs assessment of the community and work with the schools to meet community concerns.
- Use successful community leaders to serve as role models for students. Especially seek involvement of minority people to work with students in developing career programs.

Senior Citizens—What They Don't Know Can Hurt You

by Francis Larkin, counselor, Middle Twp., NJ, Schools

2nd Quarter 1993 (3)

Today's retired people are healthier, better educated and more active than previous generations. They are

demanding respect and equal rights, and do not tolerate being "put on the shelf." Because of their growing number and greater visibility, our society is becoming more aware of them and their political and economic clout:

School officials must reach out to older voters for their support. Involving senior citizens in school activities enables them "to get a feel" for programs and people.

To initiate the program in your district, try the following:

- Elementary Level—Grandparent's Day
- Junior High Level—Senior Citizen Craft Fair
- Senior High Level—Back To School Day
- Don't stereotype. Many market segments exist among them; consider the "young-old" audience, many of whom are vigorous and healthy.
- Don't patronize them.
- Remember that for every 69 men over 65, there are 100 women.

Senior citizens are waiting to be asked.

Mentors Aid Students

by Susan Weinberger, public affairs officer, Norwalk, CT, Schools

1st Quarter 1991 (3)

Now a special new aspect of school/business partnerships—mentoring—seems to be working well, drawing acclaim from educators and businesses, and helping at-risk youths do better in school and in life.

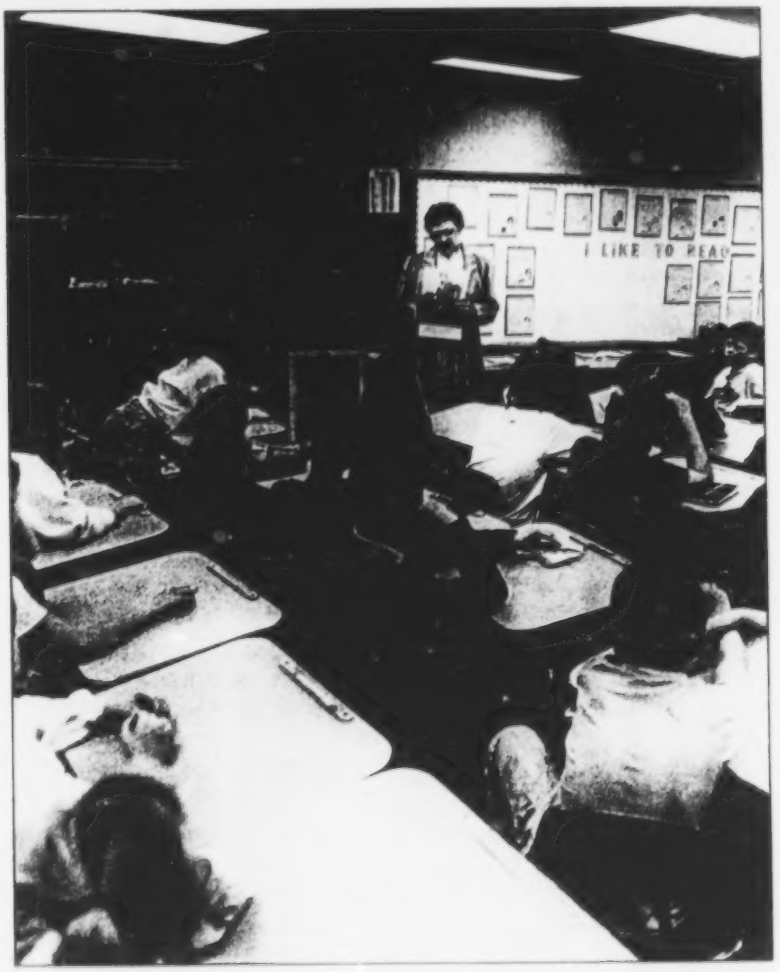
My school district—Norwalk—was one of the first in the country to begin a mentoring program; ours started in 1986.

- Volunteer mentors are recruited and screened at their worksites. Then they're trained at a session we hold at the beginning of each school year.
- The new mentors are matched with kindergarten-to-eighth-grade students recommended by the school system. A team that includes the principal, teachers, a social worker, and other support staff discusses mentoring activities that will meet the needs of each individual student— and then the weekly mentoring sessions begin. They're held in the schools, and include—for instance—mentors reading to students, going to the school library, playing games, helping with homework, talking together, and, most importantly, becoming friends.

Does the mentoring program work? We think so: Teachers and other school staff appreciate the help mentors offer; mentors enjoy the experience of working closely with a student; and students achieve academic and self-esteem goals that once seemed out of reach.

The main documented success is improved attendance, with 86 percent of the students showing improvement. The other documented success comes from what is told to us by the teachers, who are seeing the kids come to class willing to take more risks and doing better.

PHOTO GALLERY: Michael Siluk . . .



In this world there are only two tragedies: One is not getting what you want, the other is getting it.

Oscar Wilde

Techniques

Operating the Program

An Editor's Communication Audit

by Robert Baker, publisher of Impact newsletter, Chicago

4th Quarter 1983 (2)

Here are 10 items (of 99 points in the article) an editor can use for a mini-self audit of how well the audience's needs are being served.

1. Do you have an editorial "Bible" or style book? Are you consistent in your use of style?

2. Do you know the legal pitfalls likely to be encountered in producing printed material? The rules of libel, copyright, right of privacy?

3. Have you cultivated a productive staff of correspondents?

4. Does your management have the courage to discuss the good as well as the bad? Do they take a firm stand on vital issues pertinent to organizational operations?

5. Do you use your publication to expose misinformation, reduce resistance to change, alleviate needless fear?

6. Do you use your publication to highlight the achievements and contributions of employees?

7. Does the publication fairly represent all employees?

8. Do you know and understand your readers—their drives, desires, problems, gripes, creative potential?

9. Do you provide them straight facts; give them a feeling that they are getting "in the know" information unavailable from any other source?

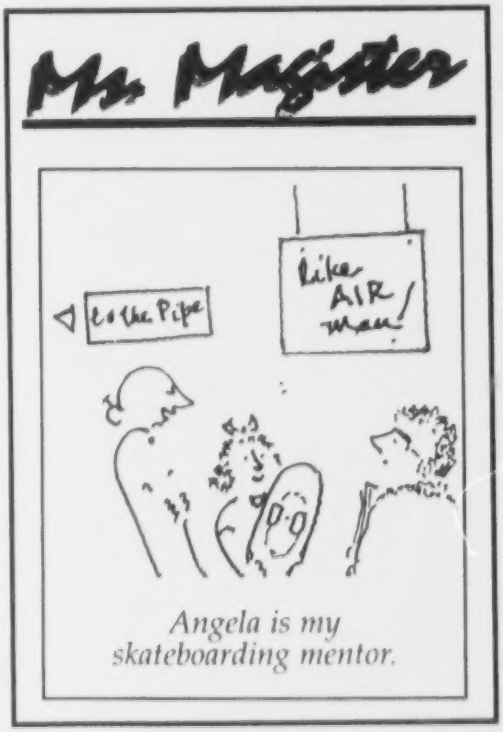
10. Do you conduct readership surveys from time to time in order to check the progress and the acceptance of your publication?

Four Steps to Speaking Success

by Al Holliday, editor

4th Quarter 1980 (7)

In the late 1970s, America saw the development of a back-to-basics movement. Its supporters called for a focus on "reading, 'riting and 'rithmetic." Unfortunately, a fourth R—rhetoric—in its classic sense — has never been part of the educational foundation. While young citizens certainly need to learn how to read, write



Angela is my skateboarding mentor.

and calculate, they have as great a need to learn how to communicate orally. But for the past 20 or 30 years, educators have not stressed oral communication skills in the classroom, and even college graduates enter the marketplace without the ability to make an engaging and worthwhile presentation before an audience.

The legacy has been a majority of adults, according to recent surveys, who do not relish an assignment to speak before an audience. The authors of The People's Almanac report that speaking before an audience is the greatest fear of most people, over dying or being fired.

Public speaking, however, does not need to be a traumatic event in anyone's life, especially if the four steps to speaking success are known.

1. Begin with a smile.

An audience likes nothing more than to be greeted by an enthusiastic, confident presenter. This implies to the audience that the speaker is well prepared, enjoys the experience and has something worthwhile to say.

2. Organize your presentation carefully.

Excellent speakers structure their speeches so that listeners will have good recall of their main points a month or two later.

- Present a strong, clear, to-the-point opening that sets forth the main idea of the speech.
- Clearly delineate the three or four sections or areas of the body for your speech (even to the extent of labeling them 1, 2, 3 or A, B, C).
- Call for definite action on the part of listeners in your conclusion. Give concrete suggestions—what they can or should do to support your ideas or point of view, or to learn more about the subject.

3. Illustrate your speech graphically.

Those people we identify as excellent speakers possess one characteristic—they have the ability to relate their ideas to ours. They do this by using a variety of examples and real-life experiences, many of which have application to our own lives, to explain their theories.

This can be done by telling anecdotes, referring to real-life situations (not jokes), the use of quotes, testimony and figures of speech. These references give the audience an insight into the theory (or statement of fact) by showing how it operates or how it can be put to use or its application in reality. In some cases, natural humor is appropriate; in others, use statistics,

quotes of people, references to books or authorities or true life situations.

4. Be as brief as you can be, and only as long as the audience can tolerate.

There is no set ideal time or ideal length for any speech. The proper length can depend on the subject, the ability of the speaker, the composition of the audience, the setting, or other conditions, but in most cases, it is the program chairman who sets the length of the talk. It is up to the speaker to keep within that time, regardless of other factors, and keep it interesting along the way.

How Well Do You Manage Your Time?

by Karl Van Asselt, director, New England Municipal Center, Durham, NH.

1st Quarter 1977 (2)

True or False Quiz

1. Effective managers embarking on a program of time management should keep such a decision to themselves to avoid putting pressure on others.
2. There are "morning" and "night" people. Time planning should incorporate these differences.
3. Investigators in time management consider the "to do" list as the most effective time management tool.
4. Handwritten memos are, by and large, inappropriate. They lack the appearance needed in written communication.
5. It is not necessary to have a written agenda for most meetings.
6. You should have your secretary place all your outgoing calls.
7. In meetings with individuals or groups, it is advisable to have incoming calls held.
8. The greatest problem most people have in managing their time is their inability to say "no."
9. You should delegate as much activity as you can to subordinates and then leave them completely alone until they complete the task.
10. You should, after providing a rough outline, have your secretary write as many letters for you as possible.

Answers

1. False. Your employees will soon feel the impact of your new system. They must know why you have made time management a top priority.
2. True. Some people are at their best at certain times of the day. You should know when so as to schedule important tasks at these people's optimum times.
3. True. By forcing yourself to specify what must be done by when, you are in effect motivating yourself to perform accordingly.
4. False. Many memos, especially short ones, are best handled in handwriting. They will illustrate your concern with brevity and speed.
5. False. Meetings should not be held unless they serve a purpose. An agenda referring to time limits, topics, questions and people will help keep participants on the topic and keep the meeting as short as possible.
6. False. Save your secretary's time (for those tasks you delegated) and make most of your own telephone calls.
7. True. Telephone interruptions are not only disrespectful to those in the meeting with you but waste their time.
8. True. If your first reaction to a question or proposed solution is "no," say it. Delaying minor decisions "for more study" can waste valuable time.
9. False. You must monitor their progress to be sure they are on the right track. (You may have communicated poorly or they may have misunder-

stood their assignment.)
10. True. Most letters requiring a response will fall into specific categories. A secretary should have the responsibility of answering these letters, saving the unique ones for your attention.

Write for All Your Readers

by the editor
4th Quarter 1977 (1)

Clay Schoenfeld, of the University of Wisconsin, says we should plan our publications around the 30-3-30 concept. That is, we must allow for the three kinds of readers: 30 second, 3 minute, and 30 minute.

The 30-second reader is the one who casually glances at your publication while sorting the mail; flips pages not really looking for anything. There should be something to catch the reader's eye, like provocative, boldface sentences or phrases that tease the reader into reading the whole article.

The 3-minute reader needs headlines that succinctly tell what's in the story and photo cutlines that provide basic information. Write them assuming the reader will not read the accompanying story. Also, watch your leads! The first sentence of every story should contain vital elements of the news you want readers to get, and should entice casual readers to continue reading.

The 30-minute reader will read most of the stories most of the time. Unfortunately these are usually the minority of our readers.

If at all possible, a trained journalist or writer should be responsible for a community newsletter. Sometimes you can find a skilled English or journalism teacher who's interested.

But, in his book on *Education and Public Understanding*, Gordon McCloskey says: "Experience shows that regular publication requires more effort than neophytes foresee (such as volunteer teachers). In many cases, after a few issues, initially interested amateurs weary of the repeated telephone calls and the editorial routine involved. Then quality declines. Trained persons are better in larger systems where news must be gathered from many sources."

Find out what people in your school district really want to know more about, and write about that.

Your Own Communication Channels

Questions to Ask Before Forming an Advisory Committee

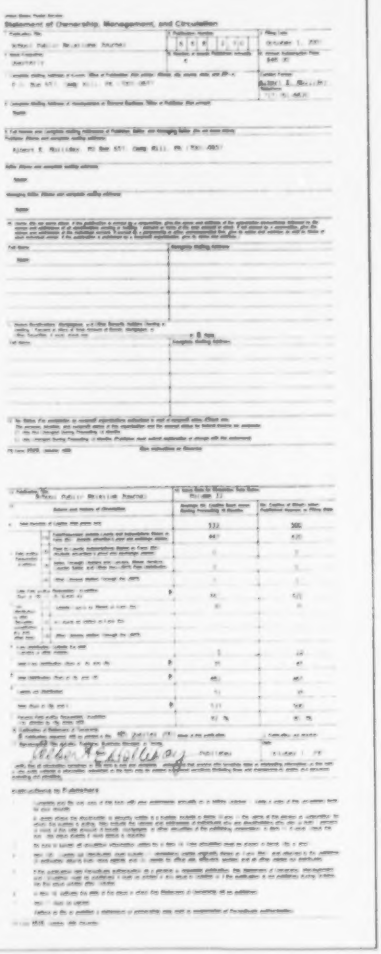
by the editor and Nick Goble, director of public relations, Pa. School Boards Assn.
1st Quarter 1980 (2)

Intro: An advisory committee can be a great deal of value in providing feedback and opinion about a critical issue to school officials. It can also be a means of transmitting information from the system to the members of the committee.

Here are 15 critical questions board members or school officials need to address BEFORE establishing an advisory committee. Answers may indicate that the time is not right to study a particular issue, or that two committees may be necessary to handle the matter. In any case, answers will be valuable to the staff person who will be responsible

to organize and work with the committee during the study period.

- What is the problem? Is it defined well enough for a committee to dig into it?
- Is it the kind of problem a citizens' committee can deal with or are there better ways of resolving the situation?
- What is the charge to be given to the committee? What is it expected to do? Are there limitations imposed on the committee?
- Who should be on the committee? How are members to be selected? What qualifications should they have? Will membership be representative of the community?
- How large should the committee be? Will there be enough to conduct business and yet not too many?
- How much time does the committee have to conduct the study? Is it sufficient to do a good job?
- Is the committee charged with making a report? To whom? Will the report be made public? If not, why not?
- If it is a continuing council or committee, how will the membership be rotated?
- What provision has the board or administration made for continuing communication with the committee?
- What resources are available to assist the committee in its study?
- What funds will be needed to conduct committee business—for example, printing, paper, postage, travel—and who is to provide these funds?
- Who will provide the leadership for the committee? How will this person or these persons be selected? Do committee members know this before accepting membership on the committee?
- How will decisions be made in the committee? Should this be left up to members or is there a preferred method?
- When the committee has completed its work, what sort of acknowledgement is planned—a dinner, a letter, a certificate or what?
- Who is going to provide an evaluation of the committee? Information should be gathered indicating why the committee succeeded or failed in certain areas so that changes in structure and operation can be made for future committees.



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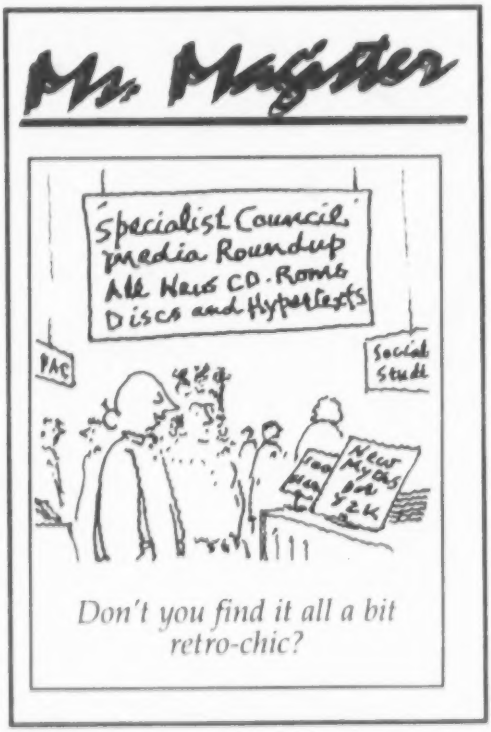
How to Deal With Angry People

by Richard S. Podemski, professor and John H. Childers, Jr., associate professor, University of Arkansas.

2nd Quarter 1984 (3)

Each person should view the anger of another person for what it is—a cry for help! Those expressing anger are really trying to communicate a deep sense of frustration and concern about a situation over which they have lost control or hope of resolving.

If your staff members can view anger as a signal of this and respond appropriately, then they will be able to deal effectively with the source of the anger and not become emotionally involved in the expression of the anger itself.



Don't you find it all a bit retro-chic?

Dealing with another's anger

The strategies an individual uses when responding to the anger of another will affect their interpersonal relationship as well as their relationship with the organization. The following suggestions will help your school staff develop their own personal and interpersonal strategies for managing anger.

- Build an appropriate attitude toward the expression of anger. Recognize that anger is a normal human response to frustration and is used by almost everyone at some time. With this approach you can deal with anger in a constructive manner.
- Stay calm and focus on the other person. Anger is a volatile emotion. When hearing anger, you may internalize the message and respond with defensive language or behavior. This immediate internalization prevents you from attending to the angry person and thus understanding the messages being communicated.
- Listen in a non-defensive manner to the feeling and content being expressed by the angry person. Do not immediately assume responsibility for that person's anger.
- Allow the person to vent his or her anger completely. The total expression of the anger can provide a catharsis for the individual involved.
- Identify the intensity level of the anger and respond to that level. Many times, the words and behavior of angry people are not accurate indicators of the intensity of the problem they are experiencing. It is possible for a person to say, for example, that he or she is upset when in fact that individual is furious.
- Define the real problem which has triggered the anger. Unless the underlying issue is clearly identified, any

solutions you attempt will address only ancillary symptoms.

• Respond concretely to the problem. You may have to recognize that you are a part of the problem. If this is so, then you should honestly admit ownership of the problem and help solve it. If you are not directly involved in resolving the problem, then you should help identify those individuals and other organizational resources which should be involved.

• Follow up. Do not forget that anger can resurface if expectations are not met.

Anger will inevitably occur in interpersonal interactions. All members of a school staff should recognize this, and the fact that how they manage anger may determine their interpersonal and organizational effectiveness. Knowing how to deal with this emotion will minimize its long term negative consequences to an effective school-community relations program.

How School Rules Should Be Made

by David Schimmel, professor, University of Mass. at Amherst.

3rd Quarter 1997 (11)

The way a school's rules are usually developed and taught has three major defects: First, it violates what we know about good teaching; second, it provokes students to subvert or ignore school rules; and third, it undermines self-discipline and citizenship education.

Most school codes of conduct share five problems.

1. They are negative, restrictive and unexplained.
2. They are authoritarian.
3. There is non-participation by students in the development of school rules.
4. School rules are usually written and distributed in a formal and legalistic rather than educational manner.
5. School rules lack standards or procedures.

Here are the characteristics of an alternative approach that is more likely to result in willing compliance with school rules and to protect safety and order.

1. There is participation. All citizens of the school community—students, parents, and staff—should be encouraged to participate in the development of school and classroom rules.

2. Rules are balanced, reasoned, and positive. Rather than being filled with prohibitions and punishments, codes of conduct should contain a balance of rights and responsibilities

3. Rules are educational. Codes of student conduct should be conceived and written as educational materials.

4. Rules should be fair.

Some educators fear that allowing significant student participation may lead to a loss of control. However, writers on classroom discipline point out that teachers who involve students in collaborative rule-making will find that their fears about loss of control are unfounded, and that the rules students propose usually are the same as, or stricter than, the rules teacher try to force on them. Moreover, students "respect the rules that they themselves make much more than the same rules imposed by adults."

Reflections

Tend Your Communication Grapevine

by Frederick C. Wendel, asst. professor, University of Nebraska

4th Quarter 1977 (2)

The grapevine is from the order Celastrales which is composed largely of trees, shrubs and woody climbers. However, the English name, Bittersweet, does give some indication of how we feel about the grapevine. The woody climbers in this order describe those ambitious ones who attempt to use the communication grapevine for their own ends.

There are about 12 plant genera and about 500 species throughout the world.

The communication grapevine is also widely distributed and one will find it flourishing in the largest organization as well as in the most isolated and tiny one.

The grapevine itself is known as the Vitis vinifera and includes many varieties of fruits, both juicy and dry. The parallel is that the communication grapevine grows many succulent stories as well as some that have long since desiccated. However, it carries something for everyone and what may be interesting to one person may not be to another and vice versa. Bear in mind that one should not judge the richness of a grapevine item solely upon one's own taste.

Consider the products of the grapevine.

It is a primary means for developing group identity and interest in work. It is a primary source of upward communication in providing an outlet for all members of the organization to tell someone else how they feel. Therefore, the communication grapevine should not be looked upon as a weed to be uprooted, but as a valuable plant to be nurtured for the useful products it offers.

The grapevine plant is widely spread throughout the world and we can also expect that the communication grapevine is widely spread throughout any organization. It may go unnoticed for long periods of time (as a homeowner may fail to take note of the growth of ivy about the house), but we can be sure the communication grapevine is always with us, in your organization and mine. Even as the plant grapevine has been cultivated from a wild species to produce the best fruit, so communication specialists and administrators should learn to cultivate the grapevine within their organizations in order to benefit from it. We all need to tune into it, to listen and to learn from it.

To get the most "fruit" from the communication grapevine, we need to discover who the "main roots" are and work closely with them. The grapevine needs nourishment to grow and every organization should provide an open climate: where communication can flow freely, both formally and informally, upward, lateral and downward in order to provide that nourishment. You will find that many promising results lie in the tender care and cultivation of this beneficial and widespread "people plant"—the grapevine.

Rid Ourselves of the Term "Common Sense"

by Jerry Bergman, asst. professor
Bowling Green State University, Ohio
3rd Quarter 1985

Defining Common Sense

The phrase "common sense" is commonly used in both speaking and writing. Common means "shared by all or many, or belonging to the community or public at large." Sense refers to the human "ability to receive and react to stimuli, especially light and sound."

The term was used to define a special faculty of the brain that was at one time believed to unite and interpret the impressions of the five senses—a mental process which combined information and formed conclusions based on the messages received from the senses. Research has shown that, except in a loose way as a function of the brain, spinal cord and gland system, this "faculty" does not exist.

To reach obvious conclusions, though, one must gather facts, and the amount of knowledge about any one subject varies greatly from source to source. In addition, all of our judgments are heavily influenced by our feelings, attitudes, prejudices, etc. The result is that often our conclusions tend to be somewhat divorced from "facts." What is a sound decision to my mind clearly may not be such to your mind.

Thus, common sense conclusions are based on what we know, including our assumptions and, especially, our past experiences. As past experiences differ among people, one person's common sense conclusion may or may not agree with someone else's.

Communicating during these times is very important—but even more important is the need to communicate our messages in a lucid manner. Using the phrase "common sense" whether as proof of an argument, to support a viewpoint, define a skill or ability, to make an emotional appeal, or simply because it has "poetic flow," clouds our messages and many times confuses our readers.

Not being able to resort to the phrase "it's common sense" would force one to find support to back up what is said. We would have to search until we found evidence or valid reasons for our position. Common sense should no longer be referred to as proof of a feeling, supposition or prejudice.

We should no longer permit ourselves to pass off unsupported statements with the "rubber stamp" proof that "it's just plain common sense."

The Case of the Virus Villain

by Philip T. West

Editor's Note:

Phil West was case study editor from soon after we began in 1975 until the late 1990s. He was also our research report editor. When he retired as professor at Texas A&M University, his daughter, Phylis, took over as case study editor. I asked Phil to write one more case study for our final issue and Phylis wrote the response. It was Phil's idea for us to run a case study in most editions. We believe readers found them to be valuable, as well as highly entertaining, as a means to personalize how people can or should handle communication-related problems in schools. We, and readers, are indebted to the West family for their contributions over many years.

Introduction

This case deals with internal and external school-community relations. Students apparently messed up the district's computer system. However, choosing a culprit could conceivably result in all kinds of school-community relations problems, any one of which might put administrative careers in jeopardy. The case also deals with teacher-student relations in the areas of computer technology, communications, and human relations. For example, how far does a teacher go in helping students become computer literate, and to what extent is that teacher responsible for having students assume this new responsibility? Finally, the case embodies public relations as the journal has defined it it over the years in both its Research and Case Study columns.

Lars Gundersen, a Wisconsin transplant now completing his 15th year as superintendent of the Lottoborro School District in Western Massachusetts, stormed into his office and kicked his wastepaper basket across the room. As if that weren't enough, he kicked it again. This time he dented the metal container.

Sophie, his secretary of a dozen years, rushed into his office prepared to fight off the demons that were attacking her boss, who, by the way, was a Vietnam vet who had been commended for bravery on two separate occasions and given a field commission during his second tour. Today, however, it seemed that he was about to lose one of the the biggest battles of his administrative career.

"What's wrong, Larry?" blurted out Doris Shackleton. Gundersen's face was as ripe as a tomato. She held a hand to her chest. "Calm down, it can't be that bad, not to die for anyway," she thought.

"The entire computer system is down with a virus that's eating up records from every department. It's like a plague of locusts devouring a field of wheat. And it's all ours. I checked with neighboring school systems and none are experiencing any problems like ours. It's internal, that's what it is. That's what I get for making our school number one in our region for computer training for students."

"What did Dr. Halburty say?" she asked. Halburty was the computer whiz in the district and the principal of the district's new high school. He was also the only black administrator in the district, chosen because he was better with computers than anyone else Gundersen had interviewed two years ago for the position of high school principal. His undergraduate degree and graduate degrees were both from Massachusetts universities. He was a science major with a minor in electrical engineering at the bachelor's level. At the master's and doctoral levels his major was educational administration and his minors were in the sciences. Computer science was one of them. He was more than amply prepared for the job at hand, Gundersen had concluded.

"He's on his way over here now, which can't be too soon for me. As to whether he can fix it, who knows? But somebody over at the high school is certainly responsible. And if nothing else, I want to know who. I hope he can provide me with some insight there. I've already broached the matter with him on my cell phone as soon as I got the news. I had just finished giving a speech at a Junior Chamber of Commerce luncheon when I got the call from Hank Drummond in Finance." Gundersen settled in his black leather, swivel chair. "Ironic, isn't it, that my speech was about the district's preparedness for the electronic age."

Twenty minutes later, Arnold Halburty knocked and entered Gundersen's office and announced immediately like some tribune, "I have good news and bad news." Before Gundersen could reply, he added, " I have a backup for the system's records. I don't know, however, who might have done the dirty deed."

Halburty's news made Gundersen sink further into his chair until he let out a huge sigh. It was like a drowning man who suddenly gulps up water after being resuscitated.

"For a moment there, I thought it looked like a good day to die."

"You don't have any Indian blood in you, do you?" asked Halburty.

"No, but I went to school with a couple. Bosom buddies, we were. But that's another story. Right now I want to know who gave us the virus."

"Well, I can assure you that it's not anyone at the middle school. But I do have three students at the high school who are capable of the deed. They are real hackers. I heard a lot of tales about what they've done already, but I dismissed them as exaggerations up to now."

Gundersen motioned to Halburty to

"I have good news and bad news." Before Gundersen could reply, he added, "I have a backup for the system's records. I don't know, however, who might have done the dirty deed."

"...Has a huge chip on her shoulder. She attracts a lot of attention from both sexes; girls don't like her, and boys trail her. She generally ignores both. A real loner."

take a seat. He did not like people staring down at him. "Who are these kids? Names please and what you know about them."

"Well, first there's Jason Jones. He's the best. A junior. He's an all A student. His father works at the post office; mother's a court stenographer. Jason has a computer at home that he built, but he's not on the internet. Has a part time job and uses the money to constantly upgrade his computer. His father won't let him get on the internet even if Jason pays for the service. Figures the internet would keep the kid from studying, take up all his time. He wants Jason to be a lawyer, not a computer gamester. Jason is a nice kid, usually polite and respectful. An only child. Can't imagine him doing something like that. But who knows? He might do it on a dare. He's done things like that before. Little things. It's important for him to be part of a group. Always wanting attention. Apparently doesn't get enough at home. His parents are active in their church. Spend a lot of time there, helping others."

Gundersen spun around in his chair to look out the window that overlooked the parking lot. No movement there. Then he spun back to face Halburty.

"I know his father. Serious fellow. Never cracks a smile. Looks like he has a lot on his mind. He used to deliver my mail; now he's a supervisor at the post office. Who else?" He was the only black civil service worker in Lottoborro for years, thought Gundersen. Bit of celebrity then. Now there were many black civil service workers and a rapidly growing minority population: Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians. Lottoborro born and bred, he was. Not many could say that these days, with all the new families moving into Lottoborro. Most of the original settlers from around this area were long dead or graying significantly. The face of Lottoborro was rapidly changing.

"The second is Tina Randolph, another junior. She's an A student when she wants to be. Smart as a whip, but flippant. Father is a salesman at Electro-Sales. Met the fellow once when I was buying a new printer for my computer. He was a pleasant guy, soft spoken, no push-shove selling, only assisted me in making up my mind; then left me alone to decide. Bought the printer from him. Mother works for Ajax Computers and Software. Software is her specialty. They got to have computers in the house, probably more than one. Most likely the internet, too. Tina has three brothers and a sister. Tina is always getting into trouble. She doesn't get along with her mother. Nobody does. She came to school a couple of

times, and all hell broke loose. Her brother William, a member of our school board, is even louder than she is, don't you know. Tina ran away from home twice. Almost became a ward of the court. Has the temperament to create the monster that was eating up our system. Has a huge chip on her shoulder. She attracts a lot of attention from both sexes; girls don't like her, and boys trail her. She generally ignores both. A real loner." Halburty's mouth was dry. He excused himself for a drink of water; then returned and began again.

"Vinny Limbini, a senior, is the third student capable of creating havoc. Although he's very good with the computer, he is not as good as the other two. He is an A student. He's the son of Alfredo, the mayor."

"Yes, I know Alfredo well and Vinny not so well." The mayor was a bombastic little fellow that walked and talked as if he were 10 feet tall. No one gave him flack and stayed in Lottoborro to talk about it. It was his second term as mayor, and Gundersen hoped it was his last.

"Vinny," continued Halburty, "is a class clown who does not have to work hard to get his high grades. Teachers make believe he's funny when he acts up. He doesn't let them forget that his father is mayor. And, of course, anyone who doesn't walk softly and carry a big stick around Mayor Limbini is either stupid or feckless beyond belief. He has been goofing around lately on the computer, some say just to create some kind of virus. Claims he lives on the internet when he's home in his room. Has his own dedicated line. Throws money around just to make friends. But he's not well-liked, and many of his classmates are liable to make anything up about him that would get him into trouble. If the truth were known, any one of the three would achieve Superhero status in the minds of their classmates by owning up to the deed. Who wants it that badly, I really don't know."

"Arnold, you've been a real help. Thanks again for saving the system. Don't ever think about leaving us."

He managed a faint smile as he rose to shake Halburty's hand. Then the principal departed and Superintendent Gundersen was left to pick up the ball and run with it, if, indeed, he decided to run at all. After all, the system would be A-okay shortly. He wanted to identify and punish the culprit. But would he do either? He didn't get his medals for hiding under a rock.

Superintendent Gundersen was perplexed, as a thousand thoughts and emotions raced through his mind. Frustrated, he concluded, "Who am I kidding? It is only a matter of time before news of this incident leaks to the local media. If I'm not careful, this situations could turn into a public relations nightmare–not just because our system was breached, but rather because I am likely to rustle some political feathers without any real evidence to assign blame."

With or without appropriate action against the perpetrator, publicity might spur new incidents.

"What should I do?" he wondered.

Philip T. West is professor emeritus at Texas A&M University. He can be contacted at ptjwest@shawneelink.net.

Case Study Response

The Key to Computer Management Is Stress Management

by Phylis Johnson

People are inclined to lose their temper very easily these days, as evidenced by the recent outbreak of "Road Rage" on American highways. Ultimately, unmanaged emotional outbursts do more harm than good, especially when the stakes are high, as in this case. Superintendent Gundersen should control his temper and be patient. It is likely that the guilty party will eventually unmask him or herself. Because of the mischievous nature of the act, it is something that most students will be in awe of for quite a while. Some, in order to rise in importance in the eyes of their peers, might even take credit for the act. Jealous of this celebrity, the real culprit may step forward.

If, however, Gundersen pursues with a vengeance the virus villain, he may by accusing Jason bring forth a discrimination suit of sorts. With Tina, the wrath of her mother and her school board member brother might fall upon him like the same so-called plague that is infecting the system computer. By accusing Vincent, the mayor's son, he might even lose his job, particularly if Lambini gets another term. He is already on the bad side of the mayor. Why make it worse!

The system's data bank can be restored by Halburty. So let him do it and be done with it. Gundersen should then have Halburty enforce stringent rules and regulations on the use of school computers and have teachers enforce them. Another incident is unlikely to happen as long as Halburty or someone with his computer capabilities are employed by the school district and can remedy the situation with little ado.

This incident, nonetheless, is a symptom of a larger problem within school districts. Indeed, one of the weaknesses across U.S. schools is a lack of inservice training for teachers and administrators who must confront this brave new world with the skills required to live in an electronic age.

Computer phobia is more of a reality for teachers than students, who take to the computer mouse like a kitten to a ball of string.

By being participants in a strong inservice program, teachers will be able to provide students with enriched computer learning experiences, instead of being one step ahead or behind them.

Gundersen should heed this incident as a warning to future problems potentially more difficult to solve than this one.

Phylis Johnson is an associate professor in the Department of Radio-Television at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. Contact her at phylisj@yahoo.com.

PHOTO GALLERY: Michael Siluk . . .

Real education is hanging around until you've caught on.

Robert Frost

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Nine Goals for School PR for the Next 25 Years

We have tried to advance the understanding and appreciation of school public relations by educators and board members since 1975. But we have not achieved a perfect school-community relations world as yet. So, we leave to our successors and believers in the need for School PR these nine goals for them to consider and labor to seek before another 25 years has passed.

1. Each public school system has a planned and comprehensive program of school-community relations, preferably authorized by school board policy.

2. The program is staffed by professional communicators and trained specialists.

3. The function of the program is to support the development of the highest possible quality education for the community's youth.

4. The purpose of the **external** parts of the program are **not to build an image** or tell people how great educators are, but to provide a **realistic picture** of the needs and accomplishments of schools, and to **involve various segments** of the citizenry, such as business people and senior citizens, as fully as possible in the setting of policy and providing assistance and support to the staff and students.

5. The purpose of the **internal** program is to build a **climate of success** in each school that will enhance the achievement of students and the productivity of the staff, and to keep management informed about citizens' interests and attitudes about public education.

6. Colleges of education will provide **required coursework** and study in school-community relations for all prospective teachers and administrators, preferably because the state department of education requires such coursework for certification.

7. Each teacher, depending on grade level and subject, has a responsibility **to establish personal contacts** with parents of their students, and teachers have sufficient time and resources for these contacts.

8. Each administrator has **specific communication responsibilities** that are part of the person's management by objective duties.

9. The school board appoints an advisory committee each year with the express duties to evaluate how well the board and staff has communicated and related with the system's publics, and recommend changes and improvements.

By the Editors • School Public Relations Journal 2001